Island Pamphlets

(Selection 1)

Michael Hall

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The use of pamphlets has a long history, but Michael Hall may be the most prolific pamphleteer in Northern Ireland (CAIN Web Service March 2019)

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(Farset Community Think Tanks Project)

(Selection 1)

Michael Hall

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Farset Youth & Community Development Project

In Memory of **Sheila Hall**, my soulmate for fifty years,
who died of cancer in 2023

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Creating a vehicle for dialogue and debate

Since 1968 I have been continuously involved in community action of one sort or another: grassroots politics, children's holiday schemes, community theatre, and the facilitation of cross-community dialogue. I also spent seven years as a social worker followed by a similar period as co-ordinator of Kinder Community House, a cross-community residential facility in Killough, Co. Down, funded by the Dutch charity Pax Christi Kinderhulp.

Throughout this time, working in communities on both sides of Northern Ireland's so-called 'sectarian divide', I was always struck by the diversity of views I was hearing, views which often did not fall neatly into the stereotypes presented by the media. Even when 'phone-in' programmes began to make their appearance on radio and TV the format seemed to encourage confrontational exchanges rather than constructive debate. I felt that this rich diversity of grassroots opinion needed to be heard as a matter of some urgency if Northern Irish society was to move into a more pluralist future. However, there seemed to exist no useful mechanisms through which this unheard voice could be purposefully articulated.

I had participated in the early NI Civil Rights marches, and was a founder-member of the People's Democracy. However, my secular and socialist upbringing (in Protestant working-class East Belfast) had not prepared me for the reality of sectarianism, and my 'baptism of fire' at the Burntollet ambush was not only a physical shock but a deeply unsettling cultural and political one.

In response to the increasing violence, in 1973 a few friends and I, having formed the Belfast Libertarian Group – and in the hope of stimulating a grassroots debate – produced and circulated a pamphlet, *Ireland: Dead or Alive?,* in which we not only lamented the artificial divisions which the legacy of Unionism had created between the Catholic and Protestant working classes, but we condemned the Provisional IRA and its escalating bombing campaign. To my surprise, reaction was almost immediate. A friend with links to the Provisionals was given 'a message' to pass on to me: "Tell your mate that if he writes anything like that again he'll get his knees ventilated." Around that same time I was confronted by Loyalists whose warning was no less blunt: "We're gonna get you, you bastard – just wait and

see!" While such exchanges certainly taught our small group something about the anti-libertarian nature of both Irish Republicanism and Ulster Loyalism I had also learned how *not* to try to engender a debate. Partly in response to these threats my wife and I decided that it might be an appropriate moment to undertake the backpacking trip across Asia we had long been contemplating.

A few years later we were back in Belfast and I had joined the NSPCC [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children], where I endeavoured to harness social-work skills to community needs. The numerous community contacts I established provided me with further evidence of the rich diversity of views which existed at a grassroots level. I determined to try once more to initiate a debate, utilising not only pamphlets but small-group discussions. In May 1988 I endeavoured to bring together a number of individuals, including former UDA leader Andy Tyrie and radical Ballymurphy priest Fr. Des Wilson, into what I described to them as a 'cross-community think tank'. However, the initiative never got off the ground.

Then, in December 1991, while in conversation with Billy Hutchinson (and later Tommy Gorman), discussion once again turned to the idea of convening 'community think tanks'. We kept the idea alive throughout 1992, intending to move on it subsequent to a major interface conference being organised in October of that year. That conference proved to be a landmark community event, and it was felt important that an account of it should be widely circulated at grassroots level. I was happy for the conference report to become the first title in the series of pamphlets I was now preparing, and when different Think Tanks eventually got underway these discussions also provided ideal pamphlet material, for the pamphlets allowed the debate to reach a much wider audience.

At an early stage interest in the pamphlets at a grassroots level exceeded my expectations, and most of the topics which would eventually be covered by the series originated from individuals and groups within the community. In effect, the Think Tank/pamphlet series had quickly become the vehicle for debate and dialogue I had hoped it would. The first titles were published at my own expense or with sporadic funding. However, a few funders belatedly realised that these Think Tank discussions offered a unique vehicle for cross-community dialogue, and in October 1998 the ***Farset Community Think Tanks Project*** formally came into being, funded by the European Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.

I soon had over 80 grassroots organisations and key community activists on my 'distribution list'. (A lack of support from Belfast's main bookshops prevented me from gaining an even broader readership.) To date, **140** titles have been produced, containing some two million words of oral testimony, and **202,500** pamphlets have been distributed around the community network in Northern Ireland, and indeed beyond. Some Think Tanks were area-based, reflecting the experiences of people living on either side of different conflict interfaces. Some focused on specific sectors within the community – Loyalists, Republicans, victims, young people, senior citizens, community activists, ex-prisoners, women's groups, people with disabilities, etc. – while others tackled pertinent issues such as cross-community work, marching and parades, cross-border relationships, our shared history, or the 'peace process'.

I believe that fundamental grassroots issues are more effectively and creatively addressed in small-group settings than in large public forums. Many who attend public debates often come away feeling that little real dialogue has taken place and that participants – whether from the platform or the floor – have largely directed their comments to their own constituencies. In a small-group setting people feel more confident that their personal input will be listened to and valued, and, if the group gels, an honesty and openness will increasingly enter into the discussions. Furthermore, unlike in public meetings, the small-group setting encourages people to bring some of their life experiences into the discussion, which allows for a deeper understanding.

The ***Island Pamphlets*** series is a world away from my first venture into pamphleteering: my 1973 document was naive, rhetoric-filled and imbued with the self-certainties of youth. In the Think Tank discussions, however, I strive to allow the participants to speak for themselves, and I refrain from passing judgement. Assisting victims and the disempowered to have their voices heard came naturally to me, but back in 1973 I could never have imagined that I would eventually be sitting down with Loyalists, Republicans, Orangemen – and many others with whom I have fundamental disagreements – and assisting them to articulate and clarify their views for the benefit of the wider community. I had come to realise that before this society can truly move forward, we must all begin to listen to one another properly – and even *hear ourselves* properly. Only when everyone has an equal input will we begin to find ways of reaching a lasting accommodation which will permit us to move into a genuinely pluralist future.

Michael Hall

Feedback on Island Pamphlets

This slim volume [*Life on the Interface*] is refreshing in the totally open and honest style of its writing. There is no attempt to disguise the disturbing aspects of the conference or the eruption of emotive issues, which reminds the reader this was not just an academic debate but was concerned with real issues which affected and divided two communities of real people. [But rather than being] tempted to despair... this pamphlet has the opposite effect. It shows that the process of dialogue is essential. (Pauline Murphy, *Books Ireland*, May 1994)

There are absolutely no holds barred here. This [*Ulster's Protestant Working Class*] is the authentic voice of ordinary people, not filtered or interpreted by intellectuals or academics. In so far as we do not hear enough of that authentic voice, or have it presented with scorn or ridicule, this little document is invaluable and should be read by everyone concerned. And if you are not concerned, why not? (*Books Ireland*, December 1994)

The Falls document [*Ourselves Alone?*] should be compulsory reading for everyone interested in a way forward for this community. (Roy Garland, *Irish News*, 3 June 1996)

Island Pamphlets have patiently contributed a lot to reconciliation in the North. (*Books Ireland*, September 1996)

Your pamphlet *Death of the Peace Process?* is the only work I've come across so far that gives voice to the people on the ground in Northern Ireland. (*Letter* from Ann-Sofi Jakobsson, Uppsala University, Sweden, July 1997)

I am currently working on a textbook for GCSE History on Northern Ireland. I particularly like the way your pamphlets get below the stereotypes to reveal more than the simplistic Orange and Green picture portrayed here in England and in the rest of the world. (*Letter* from Ben Walsh, England, May 1998)

This booklet [*Are we not part of this City too?*] should be required reading for any nationalist who sincerely wants to address the apprehensions of our Protestant minority [in Derry]. The general themes expressed contain proof that there are many in the unionist community who want to search for a way forward, who desire to co-operate with their nationalist fellow citizens in the task of building a more inclusive and settled city. ('Onlooker', *Derry Journal*, 27th July 1999)

[Michael Hall's] numerous pamphlets have played a vital role in making contact between [Northern Ireland's Unionist and Nationalist communities] – a grassroots engagement which has opened ways of communication and understanding which, otherwise, would not have existed. (Wesley Hutchinson, *Espaces de l'imaginaire unioniste nord-irlandais*, Presses Universitaires de Caen, France, 1999)

You're much more likely to find a sharper, more contemporary political analysis and a few home truths in small publications than in books which rely on the whims and potential profit-seeking sales of big publishing companies. . . In a mere thirty pages this pamphlet [*Reinforcing Powerlessness*] reveals more about our society than the hundreds of academic publications churned out every year. (Dave Hyndman, *Northern Visions*, 2000)

A group of Americans visited our group and we gave them some of the booklets. They wrote to us a few weeks later saying how much they helped them gain a better picture of what was happening here at community level. That's what those booklets do, they give you time to sit and digest what

communities are really saying about their problems. But, even more importantly, being involved in a Think Tank also helped *us* get a better grasp of what our own community was all about. And reading the booklets produced by the Nationalist community gave us a better understanding of that community too. I like the small-group approach. I have been to public meetings which turned into slanging matches, and people maybe got in a few words all night, but never a real opportunity to express themselves. The small-group context gives you a better opportunity to really debate issues. In the booklets you can see points being thoroughly explored. Being involved in that debate also gives people confidence, and helps change attitudes. (George Newell, community activist, East Belfast, 2003)

I think these booklets are an excellent way of getting views and ideas out. I also believe that the entire series will be very important in the historical sense, in that they will be seen as an accurate reflection of our working-class communities, Protestant and Catholic. (Paul Little, Irish Republican Socialist Party and community activist, 2004)

I think one of the difficulties for all of us is that there is a lack of understanding about the 'other' community. And there is work being done to bring about understanding; such as the pamphlets Michael Hall has been producing – these have been very helpful in that regard. (Nelson McCausland MLA, Democratic Unionist Party, 2004)

It is good to get people's interpretations of what happened to them. Often their recollections are so different – and all the more reason for everybody hearing them. We need to have people talking, and we need then to have some way of making those who have control of resources listen. These Think Tank discussions and publications have done nearly everything that can be done to provide a unique framework within which that talking can be encouraged and publicised. (Fr. Desmond Wilson, community activist, Ballymurphy, West Belfast, 2004)

[The Think Tank/pamphlet series] seems to me to be an epic and unique initiative. I can't think of a similar attempt to facilitate reflection, dialogue and new political thinking in a post-conflict situation. (*Letter* from Dr Bill McDonnell, University of Sheffield, 2007)

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Another prodigious achievement has been the series of Island Pamphlets, edited by Michael Hall. Numbering some one hundred titles to date, Hall's project has been a critical contribution to the post-war dialogue between the communities. (Bill McDonnell, *Theatres of the Troubles: theatre, resistance and liberation in Ireland*, University of Exeter Press, 2008)

Your pamphlets [*A Process of Analysis* mini-series] are very impressive. As a former publisher I admired the quality and presentation of these works. You lay out the problems well and examine clearly the responses. Above all, I was impressed by their content. You raise key issues and were able to assemble significant local players to look at these matters. For some time there has been a serious dearth of discussion on the matters dividing us. The politicians, especially now, have not been tackling these issues. So congratulations on all your efforts in promoting debate on these issues. (*e-mail* from Professor Emeritus Brian M. Walker, June 2018)

Mike, thank you for giving me your pamphlet [*Celebrating a shared heritage*] at the book launch a few weeks ago – such a refreshing, lucid, balanced read. (*e-mail* from historian Jonathan Bardon, February 2019)

Contents

Although any one of the 140 *Island Pamphlets* produced to date is worthy of inclusion here, only six titles – selected to provide a flavour of what is contained within the entire series – could be fitted into this book. These six are ones which have resonated strongly at a grassroots level; indeed, some of them had to be reprinted.

A full list of *all* available titles in the series can be found on The University of Ulster's CAIN Archive, from which a large number can also be downloaded as pdfs. (My companion volume to this book, ***Selection 2***, also contains a full list.)

https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/islandpublications

A complete set of Island Pamphlets is kept at **Farset Hotel** (466 Springfield Road, Belfast BT12 7DW) and anyone wishing to read or study them is welcome to do so on the premises. For further information contact:

Conferencing@farsethotel.org

Seeds of Hope

An exploration by the 'Seeds of Hope'
ex-prisoners' Think Tank

compiled by

Michael Hall

ISLAND 27 PAMPHLETS

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The Think Tank discussions were co-chaired by
Michael Hall and **Anne Gallagher**

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Introduction

The 'Seeds of Hope' ex-prisoners project originated from the inspiration of Anne Gallagher (née McGlinchey), four of whose brothers became involved in the Northern Ireland conflict and served long prison sentences, one being later shot dead. During the height of the 'Troubles' Anne worked as a nurse in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, where she witnessed almost on a daily basis the horrific consequences of this conflict. Despite being appalled by what she had to confront, she refused to demonise – as her own family members had been demonised – those who had got involved in the conflict, believing that they too were victims of extra-ordinary circumstances, and that their life experiences contained lessons for our society, even 'seeds of hope' for the future.

She made contact with paramilitary organisations on both sides of the communal divide, suggesting to them that a project be established which would support ex-prisoners in their efforts to create and sustain self-employment. Anne felt that the skills which many prisoners had acquired during their imprisonment – in craftwork, in the visual arts, in drama and music, etc. – could be purposefully utilised to this end. The 'Seeds of Hope' project, as it became known, would not attempt to duplicate the energetic efforts already being made by Republican and Loyalist ex-prisoner support groups, but would work in partnership with such organisations, as well as with individual ex-prisoners, helping not only to extend the outreach of these organisations but to promote the products made by ex-prisoners, on both an inter-community and a cross-border basis.

Ultimately, the Seeds of Hope project hopes to embrace not only ex-prisoners but anyone who has experienced hurt and pain as a consequence of the past thirty years of conflict. Anne holds the strong belief that the personal stories of all those who consider themselves to be victims of the conflict will need to be heard if this society is to embark upon a true healing process, and that perhaps one step along that road would be for the ex-prisoners involved in the Seeds of Hope project to begin to tell *their* personal stories.

It was with this objective in mind that Anne approached Farset Community Think Tanks Project. Previous Think Tank pamphlets had given her a valuable insight into sections of our community rarely offered a public hearing, and she felt that an ex-prisoners Think Tank, consisting of the core group of individuals who had gravitated towards the Seeds of Hope project, might be one way to accomplish that objective. The core group, once appraised of this idea, were supportive but also uncertain. Firstly, they expressed some scepticism as to whether the wider society would want to hear the personal stories of ex-combatants. Secondly, there

were concerns that perhaps the ex-prisoner population itself was not ready for such a step to be taken, especially if these personal stories were to be disseminated widely in pamphlet form. As one Loyalist member of the Think Tank noted:

> We need to be very conscious of how we approach any document. This group is relatively unique, in that the majority of ex-prisoners wouldn't sit down with each other the way we are doing. Indeed, most Loyalists that I know wouldn't particularly want me to be sitting here discussing things with former Republican prisoners. Okay, some may have the confidence that I won't misrepresent them, but I think that there is still a lot of people – on both sides – who will say that we don't represent them, that we don't represent their points of view, and I think we have to accept that as quite legitimate. So we must make it perfectly clear that this pamphlet is simply seeking to give a voice to us as a group of individuals – it is not claiming to represent the views of all ex-prisoners out there.

One of the Republican participants concurred with this sentiment.

> I agree. This is about us speaking about our personal experiences, around the themes we have already identified: what the circumstances were which led each of us into prison; what our experiences were while in prison; and what we feel our role can be – still speaking at a personal level – now that we are back out into our communities. If we can keep to that, then I feel happy with the idea of a pamphlet. After all, each of us is perfectly entitled to talk about our own personal experiences, and maybe it's time to start telling people our side of the story.

After some debate, it was agreed to hold a series of discussions and see whether what came out of them could contribute in a positive manner to the wider debate which is currently taking place at community level.

The contributors to this pamphlet – bar one, who had been taken by his parents to England where he had ended up in jail as an 'ODC' (ordinary decent criminal) – encompassed all four main Republican and Loyalist paramilitary organisations, for at the time of their imprisonment the Think Tank participants were members of either the IRA, INLA, UDA or UVF. Finally, it was unfortunate that although there were a small number of females imprisoned because of their involvement in the conflict, no female ex-prisoners participated in the Think Tank.

Michael Hall

Note: All indented paragraphs represent a quote, and spaces between quotes indicate when a new contributor is speaking. In line with Think Tank procedure, no quote is attributed, a policy which experience has shown allows for more openness.

Extra-ordinary circumstances

Each of the ex-prisoners involved in the Think Tank had experienced the sectarian divide as part of the everyday reality of growing up in Northern Ireland.

> I was about eight and my ma went into hospital and this aunt was minding us. Now she was a real diehard Loyalist, Paisley to the bone, but it was cheaper to get your hair cut on the Falls than it was on the Shankill, so she sent me up the Falls to get my hair cut. This was well ahead of '69 and I can remember sitting in the barbers – I had a red, white and blue jumper on – pulling my coat round my jumper, absolutely terrified. Now what was that about? Why was that fear there? It was because I knew I was in 'enemy' territory.

> Same with me. We used to go over to Peter's Hill at the bottom of the Shankill for it had the best fish shop around and it was all fresh stuff. And we would go there specifically from the Falls, but we'd never wear anything that could identify us as coming from there, we were always conscious that that could get us into trouble.

At other times the reality of the communal division confronted some individuals in a more dramatic manner.

> My first experience of coming into contact with Protestants was when I was twelve and beaking school one day. This was about 1966. I hadn't changed out of my school uniform into my old clothes, which I usually did for walking around the streets. I was going through the Protestant area of Suffolk adjacent to the area where I lived, and I met these two guys of about eighteen or so. And they seen the badge on my uniform and came over. And one of them grabbed me and says, "You're a Roman Catholic, ye wee bastard!" And he proceeded to beat the shit out of me – so that was my first encounter with Protestants. It was then that I realised that there was a conflict between Protestants and Catholics here!

> Ever since I was a kid I can remember there being some kind of division. My doctor, who was a Catholic, was at Unity Flats and I went one time with a sore throat and got beat up on the way back out. There was always a feeling of 'them and us'.

For some, the political component of the divide within Northern Irish society was also something which loomed large in their personal development.

> In school I was taught Irish history by a schoolteacher who taught very much from a Republican viewpoint, and at that age I thought that the

IRA were all great lads and I wanted to be one of them when I grew up. I had a few Protestant friends while I was growing up but once the Troubles broke out there was a divide there.

The family I came from was Lower Falls, my mother was a former member of the Cumann na mBan and my father was a former member of the IRA in the early 30s and 40s. So there was always a bit of Republicanism within the house. I remember my mother talking about this woman called Bridie Dolan: they were moving gear in Leeson Street and whatever happened a grenade went off and Bridie Dolan was left blinded and with no arms. And as you were a child growing up my mother used to say – if Bridie Dolan was walking by the door – now there's a woman who you should respect. And then you had the Divis Street riots in 1964, and I always remember the cops coming round the streets with water cannons and hosing people down and what have you. So I was always aware of the fact that the cops weren't part of our community. And then in 1966 you had the anniversary of the Easter Rising. I was thirteen at the time, and there was this Republican shop which had opened up at the corner of Conway Street; it used to sell a lot of Republican paraphernalia and I was forever going up and buying books and stuff, trying to become more aware. And I think that was when I read the *Selected Writings of James Connolly*; I was more orientated towards his way of thinking than I was towards the likes of Patrick Pearse. Then you had '68, the start of the Civil Rights, PD, Bernadette Devlin coming on the scene, things like that there. And you were starting to become more aware of what was happening around you: about housing, about social conditions, things like that.

Indeed, it was the traumatic events of 1969 which proved to be one of the most significant, motivating events in each of their lives. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the deep communal suspicions which existed then – and, indeed, which had always existed, even if only as an undercurrent – both communities believed that responsibility for these events could be laid squarely at the feet of the 'other' community – that 'they' had started it.

In '69 I was working as a plasterer with a Protestant firm, I was the only Catholic in it. And we were coming up from Cookstown after finishing a job, and they normally dropped me off in Wilton Street on the Shankill Road and I'd walk down onto the Falls and get a bus home. But this day as we were coming in towards Royal Avenue they said I'd better get off there. And I said, "Sure, just drop me off on the Shankill." And the driver says, "No, no, you'd better get off here." So I got out of the car and walked up Castle Street and then I noticed all the places burning and the smoke coming out of everywhere. And further up the road I met a friend of mine

who told me, "The Orangies have attacked." I realised then that the guys that was dropping me off must've knew that that attack was coming and knew not to bring me up the Shankill Road but to drop me off before.

In '69 whenever it all blew up I lived on the corner of Dover Street where the whole thing started – I was eleven then. Rioting was going on in Derry and there was rumours in Belfast, where tension was really high, that the Catholics were going to start trouble in Belfast so as to put more pressure on the police, to weaken them. On the 13th August they burnt the car showrooms at the bottom of Conway Street and most of the men about the Shankill Road on the 14th were all standing about Conway Street waiting on another attack. And it was actually Dover Street where it happened, and there was just a handful of people held it back initially, and then the whole thing erupted and the Falls Road was practically invaded. One of the key things I can remember was standing at the street corner watching the tracer bullets coming down. To me it was the IRA shooting down the street, it was only years later when I was in jail that I was told it was actually from the Shorland armoured cars. The B-Specials were shooting over people's heads to disperse the crowds but a wee lad was shot dead in Divis Flats that night. My da was standing beside Herbie Roy when he was shot dead and my sister was also standing there, and when she seen Herbie Roy lying there with a bullet wound at first she thought it was me da and it just threw her into hysterics. The next day I was out making petrol bombs for the following night's rioting. But I didn't understand the politics of it then, I was just defending my area.

Irrespective of who had initiated the inter-communal conflict, there was no denying the traumatic manner in which it engulfed both working-class communities.

There was snipers here and there and petrol bombs getting thrown and everything. I stayed on the Falls Road most of the day and while I was there my younger brother was up in Bombay Street and had just been shot by the B-Specials. He was helping people evacuate from Bombay Street and at that time he'd have been about fourteen, and the B-Specials subbed the whole street and I think there was four or five shot. He wasn't wounded too badly, he was just shot in the leg. I eventually got home later that evening and there was a whole mass evacuation going on – all my family were down on the Falls Road bringing people up, all the relatives that were down there, bringing them up into the schools and houses, putting everybody up wherever they could. I spent the next four or five days manning the barricades. Still, I didn't have any inclination at that time to get joined up and fight.

It was all very emotional, people were looking at houses and things that they had built up over the years all being totally destroyed. And they were being destroyed by Protestants and yet they had lived next door to Protestant neighbours. And I think that was one of the worst aspects, that although there was some Protestant neighbours who tried to protect them, there was others who led the charge against them, pointing them out. That was very significant to them people, you know, that sense of betrayal – by people who they had probably shared a pound of sugar with or a cup of tea with or something of that nature.

In '69 when the Troubles started I was nine and used to live in Brown Square at the bottom of the Shankill. And any time after that when there was rioting or petrol bombing all the kids of the area were rounded up and put into houses in two wee courts off Wilson Street. You had maybe 40 or 50 kids per house, stuffed into the bedrooms, with wet blankets put up over the bedroom doors and over the windows to keep out the CS gas that the Army had been firing at the time. It scared the life out of you.

At the start of '69 there was the riots in Derry and the call went out to relieve the riots in Derry. And there used to be a big car showroom at the top of our street, Isaac Agnews. So people went in and burnt it out. And the scout hall we were in was in Gilford Street, just down facing Dover Street and Percy Street, and we were able to look out of it and see up those streets. And it used to be a mixed area and we seen these crowds of Protestants gathering and I remember saying to someone, "I wish the bastards would come down so that we could get into them" – I'll be quite honest about that. And he looked at me and says, "Are ye stupid or something, what chance would we have?" And I said, "Fuck them, let them come down, let's get into them!" 'Cause I was very emotional about the IRA and about what was happening in Derry; you were listening till it and you seen the police going in, marching down the street and beating people up. Okay, you always had your agitators there with the petrol bombs and stones to start it off, but that's reality. And on 14th August I didn't actually get involved that night, but the next morning I remember this young girl running up to the door and shouting, "We need your milk bottles, we need your hurlies!" And my ma turns round and says, "Right, come on, we have to go up here." We run up to the top of Balaclava Street and that was just facing the corner of Conway Street, and we had hurlies, like, and my ma was down giving everyone milk bottles at the corner of Balaclava Street. We actually got in with the crowds, and all we had were hurlies and stones and bottles and all that. I was only fifteen at that time and all you seen was houses burning and people crying and things like that.

I always remember the travellers from the Glen Road coming down in the lorries and helping people move whatever furniture was left. And you seen this here scene of destruction, you know. That same day Bombay Street had happened, and young Gerald McAuley had been shot dead and there was a real bad feeling in the area about Trooper McCabe and the wee lad Rooney, who had been shot dead the night before by the B-Specials with the whippet-guns. But I'll be honest with you, I didn't join the IRA at that stage. I thought to myself: I'm a wee bit young, I'll hold off. I just didn't know what to do, although I was on the barricades and things like that. Dumps were going through houses here and gear was going there. There was a lot of rumours of IRA men coming from the Free State with their guns and all that. But at the end of the day there was nothing there, there was only the people themselves. It all really started off with defence and I believe that most people who joined the IRA at that stage did so out of an emotional reaction rather than a political reaction. It was our area, our community, so we'll defend it. And recruitment went up and up.

Nevertheless, despite the stressful situation faced by most residents in the worst-affected areas, for those growing up as youths in the midst of such mayhem there was no denying its potential for excitement.

If any Protestant, anyone with an Orange badge or anything like that, strayed near the Falls Road side of town these couple of young fellas would notice them and they'd come and tell me. And I would go and beat the living daylights out of them and take their badges. We saw their badges and their scarves as trophies, like. One time my brother and I put on all our badges and our Linfield scarves and we dandered up the Shankill Road as 'Orangies'. It was great craic.

I had been brought up at the peaceline at Unity Flats and was fighting with Catholics all the time. They came over and broke our windies and we went and broke theirs; we actually deliberately went over and broke theirs to try and get the big lads out 'cause you knew that people were coming out with rifles and guns and this was exciting. This was what you wanted when you were a kid.

For one of the Think Tank participants, however, the outbreak of violence in 1969 was to result in him being moved away from the Troubles, but, ironically, not removed from the inevitability of imprisonment which confronted all the other participants.

I was thirteen in 1969 when the Troubles started. My da was a Prod and my ma was Catholic. I remember when it started the excitement of it all. 'Cause a whole lot of kids came up Agnes Street and said that people were lootin' shops on the Shankill, and I remember running down Agnes Street and going into chip-shops and getting bottles of sarsaparilla and other

stuff. Everything was smoke-charred and burned, and there was water everywhere. I remember people building barricades at the corner of Agnes Street while the Catholics were building barricades at the other end, and I just remember the excitement of it all. But August '69 was enough for my parents and we left in September and that was me straight into England. We went to a place called Corby where my da got a job as a steelworker, and it was all very strange for me. I was the only kid from Belfast in my school and I had a strong Belfast accent. I remember how strange it was to have people calling me 'Paddy' at school, and me saying to them, "Are you fuckin' stupid, I'm from Belfast, I'm from the Shankill." And I remember always getting into fights and getting hammered because I wouldn't accept being thought of as Irish. I'd say: "I'm not Irish, I'm a Protestant, I'm British!" And every time the IRA would kill a British soldier or blow up anywhere in England I used to get stick at school, because they somehow blamed me for it. And I was so resentful and began to hate the whole fucking thing: I really hated Belfast, I hated everything to do with the place. Anyway, I eventually got into trouble and in 1976 ended up in jail in England when I was eighteen.

For the other Think Tank participants the decision to join a paramilitary organisation did not arise directly from experience of the events of 1969. Rather, it was the cumulative impact of the rapidly escalating violence which made such a step seem ever more inevitable.

Despite what I had witnessed on the Falls in '69 I didn't join up at that stage. I went and looked for another job; I worked in the docks for a while, alongside my father and a couple of uncles. And we used to go up to my Aunt Maggie's for our lunch every day, which was handy. And one day we were walking up the New Lodge Road and this Welsh patrol pulled us. They were all big, hefty guys, and they started giving us lackery an' all, and we started giving a bit of lackery back. The next thing we knew we were all rifled up against the wall, spread-eagled, kicked, generally roughed up, and searched. And I think that was the first time I really said, "Fuck these bastards!" So it was more of a reaction to that sort of thing. There was no real staunch Republican history in my family, it was more a reaction to the Brits and their attitudes – here were these people from a foreign country pushing me up against a wall with their rifles. And within a few weeks I had joined the IRA, for it was easy to join at that time.

I think the two key incidents that really triggered me into wanting to engage was the Balmoral Showroom bombing and Bloody Friday – watching the torsos being threw into the body bags. When that happened I just wanted to do as much damage to them as they were doing to us. And you also had our political representatives going round warning us about

the 'IRA threat' and you just accepted whatever they said. Nobody questioned it, by questioning anything you would have been seen as somehow treacherous. So you just accepted whatever they said without question. I just felt this was a natural thing, it was as if you were being prepared to take the fight on for this generation. I would throw it back to the education system, especially in working-class areas where you were told to 'leave politics' to other people, your role was as a follower, nothing else. And all of the political statements – Bill Craig's 'liquidate the enemy' speech was a classic example – were taken literally. That would have been one of the key things for me, being at that rally in the Ormeau Park, and hearing him say that. It was just like: well, that's their approval, that's what they mean. Then the Four Step Inn getting blew up. You see the way they call Frizzells 'The Shankill Bomb'? Well, I don't like that, because I can remember so many other bombs going off on the Shankill. And all of those actions reinforced what the political people were telling you.

I lived in Ardoyne, and probably 60 per cent of my friends were Protestants and there was never a word in our house about Protestant or Catholic. I was aware of the difference, I'd been called 'Fenian bastard' the odd time, but it never really annoyed me. Although my grandmother was a Republican my family were not overtly political and there was no sectarianism. Then 1969 happened and Ardoyne was attacked and there was three streets burnt: Hooker Street, Brookville Street and part of Chatham Street. Then Internment happened, and this probably galvanised a whole generation of people – 200 houses burning, thousands of British soldiers on the streets, five people at least dead in and around Ardoyne. After all those experiences Ardoyne became a Republican stronghold. For many people there was now no turning back, even people who welcomed the British soldiers coming onto the streets in 1969. And from that moment my own actions were directed against the Brits and the RUC.

At nine years of age I used to run in and out of Brown Square barracks, I was the British Army's mascot. I used to run to the shops to get them their cigarettes or whatever they wanted out of the shop. And in 1971 when I was nine there was an incident took place when three Scottish soldiers were lured away from a city centre pub and murdered, and their bodies were found up at Legoniel. And I actually went over to Scotland for the funeral of the three soldiers. There was a soldier stationed at Brown Square barracks who played the bugle at their funeral and I got permission from my parents and I went over to Scotland with him. I came back again and asked the question: who killed the three soldiers? I was told it was the IRA. Well, who's the IRA? And I was told it was the

Fenians, the Taigs. So from a very early age I had this impression that all these Catholics were in the IRA, and my community was being attacked, people that I knew were being murdered and the security forces were being murdered. And by the time I was sixteen everyone around me seemed to be joining organisations that were prepared to defend us against these people.

At that time we would all have gone out to meet the Civil Rights marches and witnessed them being brutalised by the RUC. But the main event for me was Internment when I and my brothers were in bed, in one room, and the next thing I was aware of was being dragged out of bed and an SLR being put to my face. Then being dragged down the stairs and threw into the back of a Saracen, along with my father and two other brothers – and taken to Magherafelt RUC station. At that time I was only sixteen and my political motivation would have been nil, but for them three or four days I was brutalised, dragged about and beat up in Magherafelt RUC station. I was released with my father, like. We had no Republican connections in our family, but when I was released Dominic was interned. I mind when he was interned going to these friends of mine and saying to them, "Look, we'd better go and do something here." So that next night three of us went out and burnt hay sheds belonging to a Protestant man, a well-known Loyalist. I was lifted after that and sent to a young offenders home, St Pat's in Belfast, and it was mainly in there that I made my connections with the Provisional IRA at the time, with people who were in for political offences – anyone under 18 at that time would be sent there for whatever offences, they weren't sent to jail. And on my release it was very straightforward who to go to to join up locally. And that's how I got involved in the Republican movement, it wasn't through anything in my family history, just my personal experiences of being dragged out of bed and being brutalised.

I think for me it was Bloody Sunday. I was there at that march, and I thought: well, if we can't walk our streets without being shot off them, then there's only one option left and that is to take up the gun.

There was a genuine desire to protect one's own community, not so much in the grander sense of the all-embracing 'Catholic/Nationalist community' or 'Protestant/Unionist community', but more in the local sense, of one's own 'home patch'.

People in Ardoyne still clearly remember some of them early gun battles. They can remember '69 when the Prods came down and burnt the streets, and in June 1970 when they came across the road again. But this time three people from the other side were killed – and people still point to that as one of the gun battles which stamped a line in the sand

which said: don't be coming back! They even had this song about "They'll never do it again". That partly explains the intensely proud nature of the people within Ardoyne and North Belfast – we had fought them alone and won . . . and they've hated us ever since.

Alongside this developed a deepening sense of community solidarity, and also a new sense of belonging – something often enhanced by the sartorial proof of paramilitary membership.

As well as that, all the UDA ones used to get a blue jacket with a fur collar on it, so I says I'll have one of them. So it was also about a sense of identity. This was the thing I thought that made you a man – that you were prepared to take your stand with the rest of the guys and protect your community.

Having taken that first step into paramilitary activity, involvement in the ongoing violence rapidly deepened.

The Falls Curfew happened in 1970 and I remember I was coming home from work and I seen the Black Watch and I seen what they done, and I says: fuck this, I'm not having any more of this! During the Curfew we were all banged up in the house, we weren't allowed out, the houses were searched, people were abused, a lot of people were arrested. I seen people getting beat up in the street, and I said: fuck this, I've had enough of this! But I had sat back for a year. I went and joined the Official IRA and started training. They had moved off the defensive and onto the offensive. The Brits were attacked in different places and there was gun battles. At that time you had moved away from defending your area to this perception that you were actually fighting to free your country. Then the Officials called their ceasefire, though there was the perception among some of us that the ceasefire was imposed on us from above. Then after a girl I knew was shot dead by the Brits I fell out with the Officials and eventually became a full-time active service member of the Provisional IRA. A lot of the people who were with me were shot dead, were interned, sentenced, so there was a lot of hurt building up there.

It got to the stage where you felt that you were going to end up dead or in jail. I knew the statistics, and the likelihood of it happening was 50:50. Everybody took that step knowing that, and it shows the commitment they had towards their own community. And the feelings and the whole mood that was in the community at that time was powerful, the ghettoised communities. There was the enemy in that ghetto over there and we were in this one across the road, although they were no different when it came to social and economic issues. There was just that divide there which had been played upon over the years. Divide and conquer – they still try to play that card today. Most people on the

Loyalist side who actually went through the organisations and all the rest of it are now more socially and economically aware than the politicians are.

But to engage in the violence required a rigid single-mindedness, a perception that everything was totally subordinate to the 'cause', something which not only blinded participants to the possibility of making mistakes, but rapidly led to the dehumanising of 'the enemy'.

I can remember a cousin of mine, whenever I was active, saying to me to "Catch yourself on, you're going to either end up dead or in jail," and he was asking questions and I was looking at him and saying this is treacherous talk coming from him. And if he hadn't been my cousin I'd have been reporting him back, saying we have to watch this boy here.

I had just started working at a building site on the lower Shankill, and this spark came in one time with a parka jacket with Che Guevara on the back of it. At that stage all the Stickies were wearing them, at least that's who we identified them with, anyway. So I asked the question – "Where's he from?" – through three or four sources. "Stewartstown Road." So I says, "Happy days, he'll do." And I decided to set him up to get him shot. And I went back out and says there's a guy down here, come down and check him out. And a couple of guys came down to check him out and were intending to shoot him but then I got lifted, and while I was in jail I found out that his brother actually belonged to the same unit as me!

There came a point in the war when the war changed, and when the enemy wasn't solely the British and the RUC, but the Protestants. Although for me the Protestant part of the war was a small part, my main thing was still 'Kill the Brits'. But you were being told, you've got to go and do certain things – and I know very few people who said 'no'. Someone came along to me and said, "Look, listen, there's a taxi depot up there and yer man in it is a UDA man, go up and kill him." "Are you sure he's a UDA man?" "Yeah, I'm positive – go ahead." And that's literally how the thing would happen. I'm not saying you weren't aware that the information might be wrong – well, I was certainly aware within that split second of carrying it out that something wasn't right. But you did it and moved on to whatever your next operation entailed.

I had been thrown out of school when I was twelve so I didn't have no formal education whatsoever. I couldn't read and I couldn't write. All my friends were joining the junior paramilitaries at sixteen, the junior UDA, and I wanted to join the UDA. It was about a sense of identity, it was about acceptance, stuff like that. Seventeen years of age I was out with my friends, drinking, coming home from a club, and I came across

a group of men who were holding two Roman Catholics up against a wall. One of the fellas turned round to me and says, "Have you got a gun?" and I says, "No, but I can get one." And as he said that one of the Catholic guys run off. I took the other Catholic guy away. I set myself up as judge, jury and executioner and I took that young man's life. So before I was eighteen years of age I finished up in the Crumlin Road prison.

There's like a whole dehumanising process went on, where all sides were demonised by each other and didn't see each other as human beings at all, certainly at that particular time. I didn't want to get to know Catholics, there was never any real attempt to see them as equals, these people were out to take over.

I think when you are growing up, everybody wants to blame somebody, and in those days it was hard to blame somebody, 'cause you didn't know who that somebody was, so you blamed everybody. And that's why it became 'them' and 'us'. It was easier to blame a whole community than try to pick out an individual.

We react to the fears that are generated about the other community, and then when the other community does something, even if they're only reacting to something started by us, it in turn reinforces our original fears, and people say: well, doesn't that prove it!

It's the whole thing again about identity, that you wanted to belong to a certain group. And you felt that to really belong you had to act in a certain way, and I think, in a sense, the more vicious you were the more acceptable you would become. And that's the reality for some people, not for everybody but certainly the reality for some. And they felt that that was the best way to be accepted among the in-crowd – that proved your identity. Especially when you're brought up to see Catholics as different and as enemies. And if you felt that your community was under attack, and people from your community was always being killed, then you wanted as much damage done to that other community as possible.

Nevertheless, there were often moments of real discomfort and uncertainty, not so much about the cause one espoused, but the actions one might be required to undertake on its behalf.

I worked in a shop and there was Protestants and Catholics both came into it. And there was one woman who I liked well, and her son was in the UDR, and I remember being in a room one night where it was discussed about killing him. He wasn't killed, but it was planned to kill him, and because I knew his mother and I knew him I was very uneasy with it. There was also a bread man came into the shop about four times a week, and he was a

likeable man, but he too was a member of the UDR. And I never thought of targeting him, it never crossed my mind, but on one occasion his name was also mentioned. Luckily the conversation went on to something else and he was never mentioned again. I was quite relieved at that 'cause I knew the man on a daily basis, and I liked him, and it's much harder to shoot people if you're mingling with them every day and know them as human beings.

I was in the Official IRA in the early days and then moved to the INLA, and I can remember once being in a room where it was said that if any Catholic was shot in Dungiven – where I was from – then we would go into the nearest Protestant pub and shoot everybody in it. I think it was just talk; it was very easy to talk about things in a room but to actually go out and do it was another matter. I knew Protestants, I had Protestant friends, but at the same time I was mixed up with a crowd that were prepared to shoot them at the end of the day. And at times I felt uneasy about all that. We were supposed to be a socialist group with ideals of uniting the working class and all that kind of stuff, but when hardy came to hardy I suppose there was a sectarian thing there too. There was also this belief that once you got a united socialist Ireland the Protestants would all fall into place; there was this almost fairytale notion that somehow overnight we would become a class-based society, rather than a sectarian-based society.

I had the ideals about a free Ireland and all that, but when it actually came to killing I was deeply uneasy with the whole thing. I met a lot of guys inside who had killed and they were harder than most others, they were 100 per cent behind the cause, and I thought that once you cross over that line and kill people it's very hard to turn back, it makes it that much harder. I was caught before killing anyone; it wasn't that I wouldn't have done it, it was just that I happened to be caught before that, so I was lucky that way.

To see one's enemy differently would have required a degree of questioning which at the time would have been seen as dangerous.

To question anything was almost like an act of treason. You became a suspect then; you came under the scrutiny of everybody. To start to doubt things was to step outside of the mould that was there, outside the community feelings. If you started questioning things you'd be ostracised, you'd be treated as an enemy, you'd be under suspicion and everybody would be watching you. And I think that would be true of both communities.

Some things that were done you felt like: Jesus, that was bad that there. But you're getting on with your life, and your life was the Republican movement and at that stage people from within weren't critical of the

> Republican movement. They said, "It's a pity, but it's happened" – you know what I mean? Like, you didn't go out to maim and kill ordinary people, you would have gone out to maim and kill British soldiers or RUC or what have you, there's no problem there, but when civilians were injured it did hurt everybody who was involved in it. Yet when I seen some of the operations that were carried out I had to turn round and say, "Is this really what we're about?" And that didn't go down well. You had this sense that if you did question an operation then your whole make-up as a person was itself called into question. And what they might have done was to turn round and say: well, he's lost his bottle or he hasn't got it any more. It was unwarlike to question, and once you did then your whole character was under focus – were you getting soft? It's like one person said to me, "You're only as good as your last operation."

Despite a genuine openness among the Think Tank participants, some topics proved more difficult to broach than others, and not everyone was prepared to talk about the actual event which led to their imprisonment.

> I remember talking to someone after our last meeting and we felt there were difficulties talking about those experiences. And part of it was that we had found that we could all sit down together if we focused on working towards those things which we had in common, and that's how relationships between us gradually started to develop. But to talk about those specific experiences which resulted in imprisonment would have created a lot of discomfort. Were we going to be giving offence? Were we going to start travelling ground where we were going to start trying to score points off each other? Would it deteriorate into a question of who committed the worst atrocity?
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> The first time we met, different things people said triggered off things which I wanted to discuss again. I can't remember off-hand, but different things. Like how much I had divulged and how much I had left out – that first meeting was like breaking the ice.

But inevitably, given the extra-ordinary circumstances the Think Tank participants had found themselves caught up in, they each ended up in the one place which provided plenty of time for analysis and reflection – prison.

> One day I was approached and asked did I want to go to England and I says 'okay'. 'Cause I knew my time was running out here, it was only a matter of time before I was shot or put into prison. Anyway, we moved into a house in England, but one day, because of a suspicious landlord, the police rumbled us. As we run off the next thing cars came from everywhere and tried to run us down and we opened up on them. And this here cop came out of a car and run behind us, so we shot him, in the lower regions of the body

– to get away, like. Which we did – we got away from Southampton. There was a big manhunt and there was photos all over the place. So I came back to Ireland, where finally I was caught and charged with the attempted murder of three policemen. So next thing I was back in England – in jail.

But it's like you're aware you have a certain status within the nationalist community, and you're aware that a whole lot of people look up to you, and the only people who don't look up to you is about five or six people who are above you. You just go and do, and the fact that you just go and do makes the people above you look up to you and say, "Well, at least you can rely on him" – so there's this sort of pressure. And it wasn't until you went into jail that you had time to reflect on everything.

Time for Reflection

For many, the shock of imprisonment would require a long period of adjustment.

We were taken into Castlereagh. What happened was there was a swoop in Dungiven and they took about 30 people, some of whom talked, and one told all about the Provies, the other about the INLA, so the rest of us were all scooped a couple of days later. And being taken in there was a bit of a shock I can tell you. I hadn't been prepared for it at all, there was no interrogation training or anything like that. We ended up in Crumlin Road, it was about two weeks before Christmas and all that. And at that point the Loyalists weren't getting out at all, and the Republicans were out all the time. Then about March the Loyalists attacked two or three Republicans and there was a meeting between the commanders of each side and they decided to go day in, day out. I was quite happy that some arrangement had been arrived at, because every time you went to the loo you were looking over your shoulder waiting for a couple of Loyalists walking behind you and all that. So it was always a bit nervy there for a while. It was also very, very boring after about six months, it was a grim place, with three of us to a cell. We had radios and all that stuff but it was still a boring place. But you were still very much a part of the organisation, and very much the talk was about continuing the fight on the inside – at that point it took the form of refusing to wear prison clothes once you were sentenced. So we had to decide whether or not to go on the blanket protest which had just begun a few months at that point. Anyway, I got sentenced to ten years and went onto the 'blanket'.

The first three years inside are very sketchy for me. I didn't know how to cope, I was on Valium three times a day, I was always on the punishment cells. For me personally when I went in, my life was as if

it still belonged outside on the Shankill. Your life was lived to please other people, I never made no decisions for myself; everything that I had done was for other people, for the paramilitaries, and then it was just falling into the same routine when I went into the prison. And it was only many years later that I could make decisions for *me*, to do things *I* wanted to do and not just do them for other people. In the beginning I was always getting punished. I couldn't read or write and I couldn't articulate an argument so the easiest way for me to deal with someone was to give them a dig in the chin. And I kept on getting punished for a long, long time; for nearly the first three years when I went in I was always getting into trouble. If anybody wanted anything done in the wing, if they wanted a prisoner or a screw beat up I would've done it. But I done it because I was stupid and I let people use me, but I didn't understand that at the time.

I went to Longlarton Prison in '76 from Wormwood Scrubs, and there was already an IRA structure within the prison. The first day there I was sitting outside in the playing field and somebody was telling me about some of the other prisoners, saying that's a good guy over there and things like that. And I said, "He's an English bastard, they should all be shot!" To be honest, that was my initial reaction. So this guy took me aside and said, "Look, see at the end of the day, we have to survive over here, you can't come in with that attitude." Somebody brought me in a *Guardian* newspaper and I says, "I don't want to read that there." Somebody had even brought me up the *Andy'town News* and here's me, "I don't come from Andy'town, I come from the Lower Falls, what would I want to read the *Andy'town News* for?" And all I looked forward to was *Republican News /An Phoblacht* to keep up with what was going on.

My first experience of prison was Internment, which was what many people regarded as a holiday camp for much of the time, because when you were in the cages, there was 30, 40, 50 men all with the same background. However, you had no release date; you could have been there a year, two years, five years, some were there for that length of time. It didn't do anything to change my attitude in any way, except for make me more determined to fight against the Brits. But everybody helped each other out. You had a lot of lectures and things like that going on, and a lot of escape attempts going on as well. I was moved into three different cages all because of escape attempts. There was one in particular in Cage 5, which was where we had a tunnel dug and it was almost complete. And they found the soil, they found it in other huts, it had been transferred by people visiting different cages. But eventually they got round and discovered there was a tunnel in Cage 5, but they spent about eight hours before they found it. The reason they didn't find it sooner was that the sappers had set their tool-boxes right on top of the trapdoor! But

eventually they did move the tool-boxes and found it and we were all evacuated because the tunnel was so massive. It was 30 yards long. Then after that I got out about April '74 and was out six months when I was arrested down South and spent ten years in Portlaoise prison, which was a total contrast to Internment – it was a real prison, like, being locked up every night. And it was rough, there was a lot of riots going on, a lot of trouble. The policy of the prison system down there was that any prisoner in there was going to get the hardest time that they could possibly get so that they wouldn't come back.

It was inevitable that confrontations with the prison system would ensue. Some were of a very personal nature.

When I went into Winchester Prison this priest came up to me the very first night – and I was still a Catholic at that time – and he said to me, "You can do me a favour, don't be going to chapel, I'll come up here and I'll give you communion here." And I said, "Go and fuck yourself!" – and that's being quite honest. He wanted to keep me away from the chapel 'cause it was too much trouble for the screws – 'cause I was a 'Cat A' prisoner, I had to be escorted on my own. Then I met this other priest who I asked to do a simple favour – send a wedding anniversary card out for me to my girlfriend's parents. And he came back to me and said, "I can't do that." And I said, "Are you a priest or a screw?" "But I have to work within the system," he said. A load of shite! I'll tell you another incident to do with him. I goes back there [Winchester] in '79 on 'patches' and Giuseppe Conlon was dying at that time. And what they were doing with Giuseppe Conlon: they were taking him in and out of the jail, they were saying that the IRA was going to try and spring an escape. And the man's lying dying in the hospital and they went in with the security van and grabbed him by the back of the neck and took him out. So I'm sitting in the block and the same priest comes down and he's talking a load of shite to me, and I turned round and says, "What did you do for Giuseppe Conlon?" "Let me tell you," he says, "that man was well looked after in this jail." That was an innocent person he was talking about! So I says, "See if you don't get out of this cell I'm going to kick you out of it, and see when you go don't bother coming back, 'cause I'm no longer part of this religion."

To be honest, the only priest who I met in England who was in any way decent was actually an ex-British Army captain who lost both his legs over here. And see the humanity that he gave me, it was unbelievable. While I was in Winchester Prison I was in the block and at that time in the block, because you were a 'Cat A' prisoner, they actually put you in what they called a 'strong box'. And all you had was a concrete thing, a mattress sitting on top of it, you had no furniture, no nothing, and it was all white

walls, and the crickets would be going mad, and you were in there 23 hours a day. If it rained you didn't get out of that cell, your food was brought to you in the cell. So I'm sitting there with only a pot to piss in, but no radio, no cigarettes, or what have you. Anyway, there was a guy came from Parkhurst and he said to the wee priest, the British army captain, "That wee lad's down there and he's no tobaccy, take him down that wee half ounce of tobaccy." And see if you had've said it to any of them other two dipsticks they wouldn't have done nothing. But he came down with a half ounce of tobacco, and he started talking to me about his experiences, what happened to him, how he lost the legs, what he felt like about it, you know. I don't think he was trying to convert me at all, but the whole thing was that he used to come down and sit with me for an hour or two, just talking. He was a crackin' fella, one of the nicest people I ever met in jail.

Other confrontations were part of a much larger protest, such as the 'blanket' and 'dirty' protests, which embraced hundreds of Republican prisoners.

At the start of the blanket protest the screws had beat up a lot of boys coming on, but eventually there were so many coming on the beatings stopped. On the blanket protest we had all our furniture, our religious magazines and all that sort of thing, but it was decided after about three months that we had to escalate it into a refusal to slop out and wash and all that kind of stuff – to try to create a lot more pressure on the system. And it gradually built up from that to smashing the furniture and smashing the windows, then throwing our shit out the windows. But as I went up one day to put it out the window one of the orderlies was walking past and I hit him at the side of the head with it! Not long afterwards I heard the boots come up the corridor and they took me out with a towel around my waist. I was taken into the centre of the H-Block and there was 'lock-up' called and all the screws came in and I was put into a corner and I was told to turn round and as I did so the brother of the guy I had hit whacked me in the face. I went down and then there was a sea of boots came in on me at that point. Eventually, I was taken to the punishment block and I was feeling really miserable after getting such a beating. And that night too I felt very hungry, but they only gave you one round of bread in the evenings. And there was an old warder there with a white beard, who must have seen the hunger in my eyes and he fired me in another three or four other rounds. His act of kindness after that day of aggro was enough to pull me back from the brink. I was going into a seething hate and all that kind of stuff, but that one act was enough to pull me back and make me think they're not all like that.

One thing agreed by all the ex-prisoners involved in the Think Tank was that the prison experience engendered a process of analysis and reflection.

> When I was involved in the armed struggle I hadn't had much time to reflect deeply about things. But in prison I was more detached from it, so I was able to think about things more objectively almost. Because you were away from it all you could see things a bit clearer.

That such a process of analysis and reflection might occur was not always evident right at the beginning, however, especially to Republicans.

> Republicans knew why they were in; there was no questioning for us. We were fighting against a foreign power, whereas Loyalists were fighting against Republicans, and not against the state which put them inside; they seen their own people locking them up, whereas we were being locked up by the enemy. Even in the South most republicans would call the screws 'West Brits', you would treat them as Brits.

This assertion was confirmed by the Loyalist ex-prisoners.

> I agree, I think the experience of going into prison was vastly different for Loyalist and Republican prisoners. It reinforced Republican beliefs about being oppressed, whereas with Loyalists we were getting imprisoned by the very people we were supposedly defending. That began a painful process, examining why you were in there.

> The day that I was sentenced the screws were beating me out of the dock and all I could think was that I was fighting to remain British yet all I can see around me, abusing me, is people wearing British Crown uniforms. It was then I asked myself: what's this all about? But I was actually afraid to ask it openly, because that was somehow treacherous. The questioning actually built up a greater confidence in what the fighting was all about. My British identity was reinforced, but I was able to recognise that there were flaws in our society which needed to be challenged.

> I think everybody used that time to reflect, but obviously you don't do that as soon as you go through the door. You needed time to reflect and eventually people would say: hold on, why am I here?

One aspect of the prison experience which started many on the path to analysis and reflection was, ironically, the contact made with those from the 'other' community. At first such contacts came about from necessity, to enable former enemies to survive within the same environment.

> In the compounds there was an unwritten agreement. Under Gusty Spence an agreement had been made with all the camp OCs that there was to be no kind of fighting and that made things a lot easier and there was levels of communication.

So there was a process in jail where you built up your experiences and contacts, planned escapes, just to fight the system all the time, like. The first ten to twelve years in jail that's all I really was involved in: whatever the system threw at you you fought against it – that kept you alive and gave you something to aim at. When we were trying to get better food and conditions within the Kesh there was contacts made with the Loyalists, and we set up a Camp Committee to fight for better conditions. I think everybody realised at that time that we faced common issues and that a joint approach was the best way forward. The Loyalists might have felt strange to be facing the same problems as Republicans, but it didn't surprise us. Most Republicans realised that the Loyalists were being used by the Unionist politicians. They had been manipulated, their own people had put them inside and now they were the same as us – Paisley and the other Unionists had rejected them just the way they rejected us.

Sometimes the contacts made across the communal divide resulted in a reassessment of former certainties.

I think I only began to understand Loyalism in Magilligan prison when I befriended a couple of guys who were in the UVF. And as I listened to them talking I realised how much the British identity was part of their psyche, and it wasn't something which was going to vanish just because a border would go, it was very much there. Up until then I hadn't realised the depth of it, I thought that this 'Britishness' was just a superficial thing which would just disappear, but at that point I began to realise that it wouldn't. It gave me a great insight into the depth of feeling that had to be dealt with and how many people in the Republican side hadn't a clue about Protestants, especially people who live in ghetto areas. They just don't know how the other side thinks. And, of course, we were never encouraged to understand them. I remember the parish priest coming into our primary school and telling us about all the Catholics who were martyred by the Prods, but there was no mention of any Protestants being martyred by Catholics, so there was a kind of a false picture of things. It was only when I had time to look into things that I realised we had only been getting half of it. Same for them about us, I would imagine.

Other relationships stemmed from an acknowledgement of the shared nature of the prison reality.

When I was in England this Loyalist got sentenced to twelve years. But when he came on the wing that night, my natural reaction was that he's an Irish person, he's sitting in an English prison, there's ten IRA men on different wings and he's the only Loyalist. So I goes down to the wing and I called him out and I says to him, "Come on out and meet all the lads." And

he probably thought I was taking him out to fucking do him, but I introduced him to everyone, and I says, "This is a fella who's in for different allegiances but at the end of the day he's a political prisoner; regardless of what he done he's a political prisoner." And there was a good relationship built up. Then in Gartree in '78 there was another Loyalist came in, and I did the same for him. Though I remember one time he made a complaint in the incident book about the toilets not being cleaned, and to Republicans any relating to the screws like that was considered grassing, so the boys came running up to me saying, "He's a tout; we're goin' to do him!" And I said, "You're not", and I kept him with me that whole night, for at the end of the day I realised that when you were Irish in England you were a 'Paddy' to them whether you were Republican or Loyalist. And one time we're going on the roof in Gartree in solidarity with the boys in the H-Blocks, and some dipstick was supposed to throw blankets out when we were on the roof, but didn't have the bottle to do it. So this Loyalist threw the blankets out for us instead!

Some relationships which were forged, arising from this shared prison experience, were initially unsought for and even deeply unsettling.

The strange thing for me was that every time I was on the punishment cells it was actually Provies who looked after me; they'd have give me part of their food parcels, they'd have smuggled me tobacco, they'd have threw me cigarettes in underneath the door, taught me a wee bit of Irish so that I knew how to ask for things so that the screws didn't know what I was asking for. And I couldn't understand this, 'cause some of the Prods wouldn't share with you, and here's guys who are supposed to be the enemy and yet of all they'll take a risk of throwing you a cigarette in underneath your door, making sure you got a light, and giving you part of their food parcels and stuff. So obviously it started to make me really think. I suppose when you were lying in the punishment cells the enemy was the system, so you done what you could to survive and you helped each other. Like I can remember there was a guy in the next cell to me and he used to swing me in tea at about half nine at night, in a plastic bottle with a shoelace tied to it – swinging in the bottle of tea, outside the window. Alternatively I would have swung him in tea, 'cause when it was 'night about' when you got out you had access to the boiler to get the hot water. That was part of the thing which started to change in my life, I realised for a start that not all Catholics were in the IRA. And even the Provies, who I always perceived as monsters, as people who were attacking my community, when you go into prison you realise that, although they're still your enemy, they're also human beings just like you, that they have feelings just like you. At the end of the day, there's many many nights you're lying in the prison cell saying to yourself – see the guy across the landing here, he's lying here in exactly the same conditions as me, but despite our

differences this guy is prepared to share with me. So obviously that's going to change your perception and it's going to knock everything on the head that you believed for years.

While there were, undoubtedly, many such moments of a specifically individual nature, at other times a collective questioning also developed, often encouraged by particular individuals.

I'm fighting to remain British and yet I'm getting put away by them, so why am I here? But I only voiced such thoughts in my head, I was afraid to say these things openly 'cause it was treacherous. And it was only when I went into the compounds and Gusty Spence encouraged us to ask such questions that we were able to begin to analyse the situation.

For a few, the prison experience engendered a new spiritual awakening. Although these would have been in the minority amongst the prisoner population two members of the Think Tank had such an experience.

During the blanket protest there was no reading material available except for the Bible, we weren't allowed out except for Sunday mass, half an hour Sunday morning, one visit a month. It was all a bit monotonous, you had a long time to think. I thought for a while it was like being in the world but not being in the world, you were separated from it and were able to see it from a detached kind of view. And I began to think about the meaning of life, about everything really, 'cause I had a lot of time to think. And I shared with Kevin Lynch, and we used to argue about faith. I classed myself as a young Marxist and didn't believe in God and all that. He did and we used to argue away. He began to convince me a bit with his arguments but we were still very much Republican and all that. And we went on to read the Bible and pray, and I began to think a lot deeper. I remember one incident, Narrowwater, when there was fourteen paratroopers killed and Lord Mountbatten was killed the same day. We got the news that afternoon and we all cheered and clapped, it was a big thing and all that. Yet when I sat down in my cell that night to reflect on the day – I used to reflect every night on the Bible readings I had read – I prayed for the souls of the ones who had died, and then I thought: how can I do that and cheer for their deaths during the day? There was all those kind of contradictions coming in.

And I read parts of the Bible – like love your enemy, be good to those who hate you and bless those who curse you – and I thought this stuff is a lot more radical than any Marxism. How do you love your enemy and all that? It was especially hard to think like that because of all that was going on. Being part of the blanket protest we were getting moved every couple of weeks so that they could clean up the dirty wings and then move you back into them. And you just went round and round and most times

there was beatings going on. I got my nose fractured over a table; I was pushed down over it when they looked up your backside and I felt a hand on my head and my nose got cracked and I went over to the cell and was spitting blood up on the wall. I had to go to the hospital for a week. So there were a lot of contradictions in my thought process, but at the same time I knew I would have to decide at some point whether I was 100 per cent behind the cause or I would have to go for the spiritual side and leave the cause behind. I couldn't have both, and yet I wanted to have both; I wanted a foot in each camp, the best of both worlds, if you like. But I knew deep down it couldn't be done and I would have to go one way or the other.

To most other prisoners, however, the analysis was less spiritual in focus, and more pragmatic and political.

At least once a week in the wings Bobby Sands or one of the others would have led a debate on, say – 'Is Irish Republican Socialism on the right road?' – and they would have picked one side of the wing to take one side of the debate and the other to debate against. But each one had to think up their arguments and obviously there was that edge to it where they tried to win the debate; but it was about things like that. I remember once they discussed the Catholic church in open debate and they were saying that it was too rich and had too many treasures in Rome and all that, while half the world was starving. At the end of the debate, Bobby Sands wrapped it up and he said the sooner the Church got back to the Acts of the Apostles where Christians held everything in common and shared with one another the sooner they would get themselves together. I think prison did give people a lot of time to think and that deepened a lot of them, 'cause I know a lot of ones afterwards who didn't really get back to the military side of things, they got into the political side, and a lot of those have been to the forefront of the move towards talks and ending the armed struggle and all that. So I think people had a lot of time inside to reflect on what they were going to do with their lives when they got out.

I think that most Republicans, though not all, have moved on. One of the things we used to talk about on the blanket was that we were now into a Vietnam situation where it could go on for 30 years, but we will eventually wear down the Brits and they will eventually pull out. Terence McSwiney had said, "It's not those who can inflict the most, but those who can endure the most", and we were told to endure for up to 30 or so years and eventually we would win. But I think some of us realised after a while that that was not going to happen. There was a lot of thought inside as to what was the way to proceed and all that. So I think the penny was beginning to drop then, that things weren't all rosy and that we weren't going to win militarily, but it took a long time to admit that, and there have been a lot

of voices working for change, and a lot of people have been working for an alternative quietly in the background. I think it's all those people working away who have also helped engineer a climate where people had the freedom to think differently, a freedom to question their ideologies and all that. Debate was always encouraged on the H-Blocks but most people wanted to debate on the side of how were we going to get the Brits out of Ireland and that sort of debate, but even at that it made people think – was it possible or was it not possible? Some of us arrived at the conclusion that it wasn't, at least not in the way we were going about it. So when we had time to think and talk in a serious way the mind can move on a bit and begin to see that things are not as clear-cut as we thought. But it's a long slow haul, it could slip back into conflict I suppose, though I don't think it will – people have moved on too much, it would be hard to get back to the way it was. There are a few diehards in the Real IRA and that who want to keep going militarily but most of them know they can't win that way, they have to come to an accommodation.

I think that everybody goes through stages and experiences and there was always debate and discussion about where we're going and things like that. I mind one instance in the Crumlin Road, like, one Friday night we heard there was a big explosion in Loughgall and our boys were roaring and cheering and banging the doors; and the next thing we heard it was Republicans who were dead. It just showed you that it didn't make sense some times. I have to admit I fully agreed with the military campaign, but you began to see different ways of doing things. Like the elections, if you see a way of getting in the door then you make use of it. I felt that at the council level at least they were taking control back off the Unionists and giving it to our own people, like. I was still talking about a military campaign as an option. But this last five years I've come to believe that there is no use for it, no excuse for it now.

I was very narrow-minded when I went into jail. It was my experiences in jail, starting to see people as real people and then seeing me as a person, which changed a lot of my thinking. I had a very deep experience in prison, although it wasn't Christian or religious. I'm not a religious person, I don't believe in it; to be honest, I think it's a cop-out.

The intense struggle taking place within the prison between the prisoners and the prison regime could impact profoundly upon those individuals already undergoing a deep spiritual journey, as one Think Tank participant recalled.

What with the blanket and dirty protests going on for so long, we just had had enough really, nerves were beginning to go, so it was decided to call a hunger strike to try and force the issue, try to break it, without giving

in. That failed, so Bobby Sands called the second hunger strike. He told us to think about it for a couple of days before putting our names down – that is, if we wanted to put our names down for it. There was bits of cigarette paper stuck together which came down through the pipes – we had wee holes scooped out round the pipes and we all had pens stashed away. The first two guys – Kevin [Lynch] and I were in the second cell from the top – the first two put their names down. Then Kevin put his name down, and I was next in line, the fourth. And I said to myself that I'll either be the first to refuse here or I'll go for it, for I couldn't make up my mind, and thought about it for a couple of days. Because I was feeling at that point that I wouldn't be involved when I got back out again anyway, I had begun to move away from things. But I decided that since I was there and part of it I would see it through, so I put my name down and about half the men on the wing put their names on for it. So, I was fourth in line for it on the INLA side. Patsy O'Hara died, then Kevin who was in the cell with me he went on, and he died after 71 days, I think. And I knew I was next after him for another guy Michael Devine was already on it. So I had to prepare myself; I knew he was going to die, so I had to prepare myself by shutting everything out of my mind and thinking: I'm going on hunger strike, I have to see it through and mustn't let anything distract me. Whatever mental or physical pressure comes I had to focus in and think to myself: no matter what comes I have to see it through. So, I went on it. The first few weeks I had a lot of hunger pangs but nothing too serious, and I moved up into the hospital wing. Then after about 44 days I began to feel the effects then. Up to that I was walking round the yard for an hour's exercise every day and taking association in the evening. But now my eyesight began to be affected and my balance went a little bit.

By day 50 I went blind and I was throwing up a lot. I had been throwing up a lot because of my eyesight bouncing about all over the place and I felt I couldn't take much more of that – on the worst night I felt that if this kept on going I didn't know how I was going to cope – but the next day I went blind and the sickness stopped and I kept going for another four days. And on the 55th day, it was a Saturday, I woke up and I felt a lot weaker from the night before. I knew I was on my last legs, as they say, I wasn't sure whether I would waken the next day or not. There was ten dead at that point and the hunger strike had begun to fracture. The two guys before me, Pat McGeown from Belfast and another guy from Tyrone, had been taken off by their parents and then there was a gap before I was expected to die. And Fr Faul on the outside saw that the only weak link in the hunger strike was the parents, so he tried to talk them into taking their sons off it. My mother came up on the Saturday morning – well, first of all the local priest came in to try and talk me off it but I didn't allow him to. Then my mother came in and said she was going to take me off as

soon as I lost consciousness, which I thought would probably be the next day. And that if I kept on going I might lose my sight permanently. At that point I thought I had no choice: if I kept on going I was going to leave it in her hands, she was going to have to take that decision so it would be better if I took it on my own head rather than leave it on hers. So I stopped at that point. I experienced a mixture of emotions I must say. Relief at not dying... it's a hard way to die, 'cause you're thinking of things like the seashore, or walking through fields, things you haven't done for years, just ordinary things, seeing your family... and you don't really want to die. So it was hard to let go; I was prepared if I had to, but I was hoping that I wouldn't have to at the same time.

So I came off it and during the hospital time – I was in Musgrave Hospital – I was making slow recovery, my balance was badly affected, my eyesight took about a month to get back to reasonable level. And all that time I thought to myself: I went through all this and if I've come this far now, when I go back down to the prison I am going to have to be an ex-hunger striker full of Republican zeal and the cause and all that stuff, or else I am going to have to stop and come out on God's side if you like, the spiritual side. So, I wrestled with that for weeks on end, thinking I was turning my back on all the guys who had died, the boys on the blanket and all that. But finally – I think I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown – about eight weeks after the hunger strike I decided to go for God, and more or less said to myself I would try and go God's way and leave aside all the other stuff. So that's what I did and I got a great sense of peace then. A few months later I was moved to Magilligan and I sent out messages to the outside that I had resigned from the INLA. The story that went round at the time was that the hunger strike had affected my head.

This disbelieving reaction by one's comrades was confirmed by the Loyalist prisoner who had taken the same path.

Yeah, the first thing everybody said was: well, you must have turned Christian to get out quicker. But the reality is that no prisoner has ever been released because he has turned a Christian. In fact, they keep you in longer, 'cause they think you're trying to work your ticket. I remember when I made my profession, when I got to the stage where I knew that I needed to do something, I knew that everybody respected me because of what I had done both outside and inside the prison. But when it got to the stage when I said, "Right, I'm a Christian", they said "his head's away with it, give him a week and he'll be back to his old self." Now, for me what made me actually leave the Loyalist wings and go to the mixed wings was a wee verse in the Bible which says God is no respecter of persons. So I knew for the first time in my life that I'm going to have to love

these people who I've hated all my life. But that was the challenge and you had to take your stand, you had to dare to be different, and say: well if this is what it says then you're going to have to do it, and you can't do it here, you've gotta go and be with the people that you don't like. And when I went and asked the governor to transfer me to the mixed wings he says, "What are you up to?" I said, "I'm up to nothing." And he says, "You're not going down to the mixed wings for nothing", and I said, "I am." And I went down into the mixed wings and they had me watched 24 hours a day because they didn't trust me.

The fact that the prison experience could be instrumental in engendering a deep personal reflection was also confirmed by the Think Tank participant whose parents had moved him away from the conflict in Northern Ireland back in 1969 only for him to end up as an a 'ODC' in an England jail.

I was in Bedford prison which was a Victorian remand prison and as YPs [Young Prisoners] you were locked up three to a cell, a cell that was twelve foot by eight, no toilet in it, slopping out, piss pots, and it was a bit of a shock when I first went in. In another sense it was very familiar, because out of 36 cells on my landing, in 24 of them there was at least one guy from the town that I lived in, which was only a town of 84,000 people, and many from my estate. So I began to develop the theory that society created its own criminals, and I was one of those people who were being grown and developed as a criminal, and I didn't like that idea, I thought I don't want to be a criminal. But I didn't understand society and how it worked, and I didn't understand power, and how it operated, because I was quite politically naive. I just thought it was very unfair that I was there, and I thought that the whole system was loaded against us in a way, there was no chance that we would ever get a decent job, we would always be in poverty and debt. So I began to educate myself through reading, trying to educate myself about why things were as they were. I read *Ulysses* in about three days in jail; I remember being up at all hours reading Joyce and all sorts of stuff and then that got me more interested in how society was structured and why.

A part of that journey of self-discovery had been occasioned, however, by an extraordinary coincidence which had brought the Northern Ireland conflict right to the cell beside him, with far-reaching impact.

I had been sentenced to three years for violence, and there was this IRA guy on hunger strike in the cell next door to me. As a YP I had to deliver food to his cell, even though he wasn't eating it. At that time I was still filled with resentment at the whole Northern Ireland thing, and the way I had been stigmatised at school as a 'Paddy', and my first thought was

to scald him or to cut him with a razor or something. But then when I saw him I just felt complete pity for him. He was wasting away, he weighed about five stone and he was just lying on the floor on newspapers, dressed in his yellow stripes, with nothing in his cell except a pisspot and a Bible and the full tray of food which I brought in and then took out. And although we only had a few moments of conversation each time, I began to have a dialogue with him and he told me that I should educate myself because I didn't know anything about my own culture. And I think he was absolutely right. And what struck me about this guy was that here was somebody who was doing something that he believed in, which he was absolutely and totally committed to, and he knew all about his culture. At that time I was ashamed of being from Belfast and I was confused about who I was, so he kind of inspired me, for I could see that what gave him his strength and pride was this knowledge about his culture and his community and country and personal identity. And it was after that that I just decided to educate myself, and just started studying in prison and then when I got out I continued it and didn't go back to Corby.

The realities for families

The ex-prisoners had a particular concern for their families, whose hardships had not always been fully appreciated during their imprisonment.

When I think about it, most families of people in jail were really doing prison themselves, because of the effort they had to make to look after the ones in jail and the travelling up and down they had to do. It took a long time for many prisoners to realise that their families were actually doing prison as well; especially wives with maybe two or three children and the husband locked up, that's a terrible burden. And families were always preparing for the next week's visit, and many prisoners didn't realise just what went into one visit, didn't realise that it took a whole day's effort.

After I got out I remember going up one time to see my brother, and I was the only bloke on the bus; there was a lot of women going up to visit their loved ones, husbands, what have you. And their wee kids were there with them. And I listened to them talking about what they had had to do without that week – like making do with sausages instead of meat – because they had to buy their men all this stuff for their parcels. And they were all talking away about what they were doing without. But see on the visits later, were they talking about all this to their men? Not a

bit of it, they were all just smiling and laughing – and they probably didn't have a fucking dinner to go home to!

The families were always faced with numerous everyday needs. But what needs did *we* have inside? It was: have you got a roll-up, have you a half ounce of tobaccy, have you a tea bag – all very minute things. Sometimes I think prisoners could be very selfish. I used to describe the visiting room as a bus station: there was never any problem, the bus was always there on time – the visitor was coming up – and if the woman was starting to talk about debts or whatever, it was, "Ah, don't talk about that; what's the craic, let's have a good time." And yet the families coming up would have immense problems at home to cope with.

Others, however, were well aware of the impact being felt at home.

You were always mindful of what they were going through, even making up parcels; at one time there was four of us in jail, and my mother was asking if we had warm socks and warm underwear, but it always played on your mind and to this day I would always respect my mother, and I would 'phone her every day, or go over and see her. Maybe it's a guilt thing too; you'd give her a fiver or a tenner for the bingo or whatever, do whatever you felt you could do, 'cause she was the one who suffered most. We were in there and it was like a family, a second family till me. But she was on the outside and had to put up with the hardship, of getting up to jail to see you, and she suffered most. The whole thing was a shock to her, she couldn't understand it, like.

A reassessment

What prison meant on a personal level to the Think Tank participants was different for each individual. One Loyalist was quite open about the impact it had on him:

I'm glad for the prison experience, for I think it's made me into a real person, I've learnt to make decisions for *me* and not for somebody else. I found myself, I found my true identity, who I was, and I think that makes me a better person. Obviously I regret the circumstances that lead me to be there, and I regret the things I have done in the past, but I think I am a better person now. And I am prepared to take risks to work for peace; I'll go into any area if I think my being there will help encourage dialogue. I really want things to change. And I suppose I'm thankful too that I ended up in prison, 'cause it basically kept me alive as well, it was only a matter of time.

And one Republican, whose bomb had killed six innocent civilians, was equally forthright about such regrets.

> I will always deeply regret killing those people and all the hurt and suffering I caused their families. I gave a warning and a warning should be heeded, but it still doesn't matter, it was my actions which caused the deaths of them people. It's something I still live with yet. But I can't turn back the clock; I done it, and although it wasn't my intention that's still no excuse for it. I gave a warning, and it was adequate, and it would be easy to turn round and blame the RUC, but I planted the bomb – it was my actions which killed those people. I had no intention of hurting them or their families. It wasn't an attack on the Unionist people, it was economic. At the time we thought the Brits would eventually pull out if we kept up the pressure, it was as straightforward as that.

But it would be wrong to assume that a feeling of regret or remorse was an inevitable product of giving men time to reflect on the deeds which led to their imprisonment.

> Because many ex-prisoners are now involved in community work there is this public perception that ex-prisoners are into community development 'cause they are sorry for what they done in the past. That's a load of old bullshit as far as I'm concerned. If people lifted up a gun, they did it because they cared for something, and I'm talking about within both of our communities.

Ultimately it was the desire to impact upon the developing peace process, which saw many ex-prisoners take the lead in developing dialogue between the two communities.

> A major force in moving politics forward in this country has been former combatants, former prisoners, people who have been at the coalface in some fashion. It sticks in my throat that you have all these politicians running around now as if they invented the 'peace process', and the community is only now seeing the fruits of all their hard work. I'm also very sensitive to the fact that most of the real groundwork that was done by people, stuff that involved breaking down barriers and stepping over boundaries, needed a large degree of trust and confidentiality about it, because it could be so easily misinterpreted or deliberately misrepresented.
>
> That involvement, that desire to move things forward, started a long time ago. People aren't generally aware just how many of the progressive things you see happening now were influenced by the efforts of people in the paramilitary organisations. Even some aspects of documents like the UDA's *Beyond the Religious Divide* and

Common Sense have often ended up in other documents written by the mainstream political parties, though they'll never admit it – there has been a subtle usage of all that creativity and energy.

There is perhaps a tendency for ex-prisoners, because of the high-profile impact their political representatives have made on the political scene in recent years, to forget that many courageous individuals and community groups struggled over the years to hold their communities together, often having to confront paramilitary organisations in the process and take as many risks in the 70s and 80s as the ex-prisoners found themselves taking in the 90s.

I can accept that, and I can appreciate why some community groups looked at me suspiciously at first when I came out. Initially you were still a paramilitary person to them and while they wouldn't necessarily have been standoffish they would have been cautious about you. Until they heard you had a different point of view than what they had expected. Once they began to hear your viewpoint, once they heard you challenging established elected representatives on some of the social issues in the area, then the community people began to say "Yes, he's okay", and would have assisted your development and directed you onto different committees, into different community groups.

The move towards peace actually came from *both outside* the jails and *within* the jails, and the thing that you have in jail is time to reflect and time to look at things, and there may be some instances that make you turn round and say: hey, there's gotta be other ways of doing this here. I can remember saying in 1988 that there has to be another way forward here and I was called a traitor because I was actually saying that. I was saying that there had to be a more peaceful way of doing things, that I believed the armed struggle had come to a conclusion, and what we had to do now was be strong in ourselves, and what we believed in. And if what we believed in was right then we should be able to convince by force of argument rather than by force of arms what the way forward was. But people didn't want to hear that at that time.

I think as well that Sinn Féin's move into politics after the hunger strike has helped them to meet with Loyalists and Unionists on a one-to-one level and all that, and a lot of them will have realised by now how much their Britishness is part of them, that it wouldn't just happen that once there's a United Ireland things will all be rosy. So they began to realise that there had to be another way of achieving a United Ireland.

The truth is the paramilitaries have been key motivators in bringing the peace process about, but there's people in the Protestant community,

particularly certain Unionist politicians, who try to sow distrust about our intentions, or try to tell us that we shouldn't be getting involved in politics. But why shouldn't we be part of the peace process, why shouldn't we be involved in our communities, why shouldn't we be getting involved in politics? I think that it's *their* political agendas which should be questioned.

When I was inside I think that everybody would have loved to have had another way of resolving the conflict but everybody thought it was going to be impossible; that we were never ever going to come up with an alternative, better leave it to our politicians. But at the same time we had started to get disillusioned with those same politicians; after all, they had used us to defend Ulster and then disowned us. Then a few strong individuals began to say: no, we can try to do something for ourselves here. And if you look at the state of Northern Ireland today, it's in a far more hopeful state because of all the dialogue that's going on everywhere. And ex-prisoners were among those who assisted that dialogue to take place.

Although the ex-prisoners felt that there were still dangers ahead, nevertheless there was a feeling that things had changed irrevocably.

I know in my family there is a feeling that they don't want to go back. They would still be staunchly Republican but at the same time they want to move away from the physical force approach and move onwards. It's the young ones of 18 who you have to watch.

Because of the political process, because the likes of Sinn Féin and the PUP and the UDP have begun to engage in debate, even if only through the media at times, an appreciation of the commonality of people's needs has developed which is very hard to walk away from. One of the philosophies of Republicanism was that this is the generation that's going to do it, it's not going to be passed on to another generation. But if you look back over the last thirty years, how many generations has it been passed on to? And there does come a time when you have to realise that you don't have the sole right to dictate how things should be done. I believe the *community* have that right, to decide what way they want to move forward and they should be consulted on that. And you have to identify with *their* needs.

One Loyalist firmly agreed that *all* levels within this society were required to change.

There is a serious level of sectarianism in the middle class that never gets dealt with, or even acknowledged. They have been able to maintain a distance in some way by saying that it's *us* fighting with each other and they've had no part in it. But even while they were calling us the scum

of the earth many of them were egging us on privately. And those of us who did get involved, when you go back to what got you involved you come to reassess things. But those who never got directly involved never analyse it, and for many of them – these middle-class ones – their attitudes haven't changed one bit.

It's not just the middle class who are egging people on from the safety of the sidelines. I was in Dublin recently and I actually heard two people sitting in a cafe talking about Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness and one guy was saying that Adams was like Michael Collins and he hoped he ended up the same way. And these are people who are living comfortably in Dublin, who haven't experienced all that our communities went through, who are saying that!

A wee lad I once helped get off going to prison, by telling him to fight his charge, said to me recently, "Youse are all oul men now; why don't the IRA just give *us* the weapons and let us get on with the war?" And the reality is that although there is a peace process, although we are moving forward and although there is a lot of trust being built up between various political parties, there will always be an element, regardless of where they come from, who want to turn round and say that violence is the only way to achieve things. And what we have to do is put something in place that doesn't undermine these people as such but exposes the weakness of their analysis.

There's a lot of people who are glad to see the peace process, although they're often afraid to admit it. But privately they turn around and say, "Well, I'm glad that my son is not going to have to go through this, or my daughter is not going to have to live through this the way we had to."

'Seeds of Hope'

The impact of the last thirty years of violence upon this society, the terrible toll it has taken, in human terms, and yet the potential which exists for renewal and hope, was nowhere better articulated than in the contributions made to the Think Tank discussions by my co-chair Anne Gallagher. The bewilderment and pain that many people experienced was something she felt very deeply about.

I remember Internment vividly because I was nursing in the Fever Hospital and there was this little baby I had nursed for a few weeks and it was getting more and more dehydrated and it died that evening. The

father went absolutely berserk and I remember thinking that this was such a cruel moment. And I had to do the little baby up, and there was a certain way we were taught to fold the little sheet, and I remember as I was covering his little face just feeling absolutely devastated about death, and then I got a 'phone call that the matron wanted to see me. She informed me that my father and three of my brothers had been lifted. And I just couldn't relate to this at all. Matron had organised a taxi to take me into Belfast city centre from where I got a bus home. And I'll never forget that night, for Bellaghy was all lit up by the light of the Army jeeps and my mother had been heavily sedated. Now nurses are taught that there's a cause to every disease and quite often a cure. And I remember thinking that, just like the infection which caused the death of the little baby, in some way another type of infection had engulfed this whole society, but that somewhere there must be a cure.

Her experience was at both ends of the spectrum: her brothers were heavily involved in the ongoing conflict and yet she, as a nurse, was confronted daily with the devastation this conflict visited upon all those who were numbered among its victims.

Because I was trained as an infectious diseases nurse I probably saw the extent of the suffering at a very profound level, because the patients who had lost limbs were in a long time and as a staff nurse in neurosurgery I was nursing policemen, soldiers, civilians, paramilitaries . . . all sides of the conflict. At visiting times especially I was always taken by the tears of the patients and the relatives at the bedside and I used to think: my God, the same tears, the same grief. And I was thrown into this terrible anguish because I had four brothers in prison who I loved deeply and yet I was constantly confronted with the results of the conflict which they were a part of. And yet I always had a tremendous compassion for everyone affected by it all; I held no bitterness towards anyone, not even towards the soldiers who would have raided our house every second or third weekend. I remember having to have my dressing gown at the foot of the bed because quite often the door wouldn't have been knocked and all you would have heard was, "Out, out, out!" Then the house would have just been taken over. I suppose the one thing I remember most is my mother; mammy was always very gentle and quiet and she used to cry, or pray. Whenever you heard the door going I'd hear my mother praying out loud, "Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in You." And there was one night I went over to a policeman and said, "Why do you have to keep raiding this house?" And he says, "It's our duty, but believe me, in the police station here we have great respect for your mother; we don't want to have to do this but it's our job." And I appreciated that but it still

didn't . . . I just felt my poor mother was worn out, but she would never curse them, to her they were still somebody's sons. And I think that's what I probably learned from her, that this was their duty, but she never would have talked in an angry way.

Anne also felt that while it was easy to hide from any responsibility, or easy to sit in judgement upon everyone but oneself, each person in this society was faced with choices to be made every day, and some of the ways we responded to those choices only prolonged the agony for us all while others helped us to begin the healing process.

My best friend, who lived opposite us, was a Protestant, and it was only when Paul was arrested for attempting to take the life of her uncle that her mother stopped speaking to my mother. And my mother was absolutely devastated 'cause the woman would have been her best friend and had been in and out of our house for years. Then, on the day of my father's funeral Paul got out of Magilligan for the funeral Mass, and the whole town was closed off and there was a lot of security. And I remember before they came to take the remains away I looked across the road and thought: oh, God, I just couldn't let my father's remains be taken from the house without going across to this neighbour. And when she came to the door I just put my arms around her and said, "I just want to say thanks for coming over to mummy yesterday 'cause it meant so much to her." And she just said, "I know it's not your dad's fault." And from that day to this mummy and her have become friends again. The reason I'm saying this is because sometimes there is a risk in ignoring something that is very hard to do. I knew that that was maybe the worst day to do something like that, but it was also the best day.

It is her trust in the basic goodness of people which sustains Anne's own belief that each one of us in this society can nurture 'seeds of hope'.

I used to give talks on justice and other issues. And I was asked once to speak in the Mansion House, Dublin, on 'learning to forgive'. So I got up and gave my talk and then the next speaker got up. Her only daughter had been murdered by the INLA and at the end of the talk both of us got a standing ovation. After that we became very good friends and she invited me up to her house and once I stayed overnight. I was in the daughter's room and all her little bits and pieces were still there, and I was lying in that bed thinking that to that woman I represented, through my brothers, the organisation that killed her beautiful daughter, and yet she was reaching out to me. I think that's where progress lies, when little seeds like that are planted.

The forgotten victims

H.U.R.T.
Victims' support group

compiled by

Michael Hall

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Introduction

In the course of the last three decades over 3600 people have lost their lives as a direct result of what has been described, with great understatement, as Northern Ireland's 'Troubles'. Even leaving aside the large number of people who have been left permanently scarred – whether physically or emotionally, and often both – those 3600 fatalities represent 3600 extended families – mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, aunts and uncles, grandparents and grandchildren – who have been left to share the burden of trauma and the pain of bereavement.

In a society which is still deeply divided one thing unites all these families – a common grief and a shared experience of loss. In recent years a number of support groups have emerged to try and provide assistance to such families. Invariably, these groups originate from among the victims themselves, largely because government is felt to have ignored their real needs – indeed, these families consider themselves to the forgotten victims of the Northern Ireland conflict.

One such support group, HURT (Homes United by Ruthless Terror), was formed in 1998 and is made up principally of the families of people murdered in the Upper Bann area. Its membership is drawn from both security force families and civilians, and although this membership is predominantly Protestant, its outreach support embraces Catholics who were also victims of sectarian murder.

The major aim of HURT is to improve the quality of life for members of the immediate families of those who were murdered. This might range from the provision of a befriending service run on a voluntary basis by group members, to assisting family members prepare for, and avail themselves of, employment, training and Further Education opportunities. But the group has a number of other objectives, from helping in whatever way it can with the healing process, to actively seeking justice for those whose loved ones had been murdered and where no-one has yet been made amenable to the due process of law.

Above all, the group members have a real desire to reach out to other people affected by similar circumstances. They also wanted to share their personal stories so that others in this society could gain an insight into the reality that they experience every day. To this end they approached the Farset Community Think Tanks Project and over a series of evening meetings (held during April/ June, 2001) they described, with much pain but yet with honesty and courage, the largely hidden legacy of the violence which this society has had to endure for the last three decades.

Michael Hall Farset Community Think Tanks Project

The forgotten victims

Needing help

The HURT victims' support group engaged in a range of activities on behalf of a sizeable number of families.

> There's 55 families in our group. There's some who want to be members of the group but who will not come to meetings, they find it really hard to come in with a crowd. One of us would go out to their houses to visit them.
>
> We are in contact with different groups; we have attended different conferences. I personally didn't really go out among people, I used to avoid crowds, but from the group started I find now that I look forward to the meetings with other groups and hearing about the different things they are interested in.
>
> As well as providing different support activities we also formed a human rights group. About sixteen families in our catchment area were affected by one particular IRA gang, and about twelve of those families are members of our group. And they work together to try and put pressure on the government to bring that gang to justice – from a human rights perspective, for all their loved ones' right to life was taken from them, and no-one has ever been made accountable. We have had meetings with Adam Ingram [Security Minister with responsibility for Victims] about this issue – as well as looking at other cases – and we also link in with the police and try to put pressure on them too.
>
> And we don't just deal with the wives and children of those who were murdered, we have older men, pensioners, who lost their sons. We provide whatever domestic support we can for them; for example, Mary makes soup and takes it out to some of them.
>
> Ours has been the first victims' group to do a lot of things. We're the first to form a children's soccer team, with boys and girls. We cleaned up there at a wee art competition at Christmas – with our children winning three of the top prizes. We want to do practical things with the children – and that's one of the most frustrating things about having no funding because the kids are busting to get doing so many things. One of the points we made recently is that children are children for such a short space of time, and in a few years' time they go on to being adults. Even the Christmas hamper scheme cost a fair wee bit to put together.

We're also lobbying hard on the Libyan connection – it was Libyan weapons which were used to murder some of our loved ones. We're working away too with the Dublin government as well. I think they're keen to please; they haven't delivered yet, but I think we will make big inroads there.

Perhaps. I find everyone appears interested in you but once you go back out through their door they forget about you.

What were the basic needs which first brought the group into existence?

We needed a voice.

Yes, nobody was doing anything for us.

Until Gareth [Porter, Co-ordinator of HURT] came along and helped us to get things done. Even help us find out more details about what had actually happened to our loved ones, things which we were never told about – everything was just left in the background, nobody told us anything. And not only have we learned a lot more by working as a group, we have companionship, we get out for evenings or weekends which we never did before and we can all get together and compare what way we feel and what happened to us in the past. We're all mostly in the same boat, so we are.

The group members claimed that none of their needs were being met by government or other agencies.

The last person I seen was the funeral undertaker, that was it, you were just left to cope on your own. Nobody came to ask: can I help or anything? Your loved one's taken away and you're left sitting on your own, with no help whatsoever. My husband was dead ten years and nobody ever knocked on my door to ask: do you need help, are you coping? My daughter was only thirteen and she spent all her time lying there in her bed. All she wanted to do was die, she was pulling the hair out of her head, and nobody wanted to help. I was left to cope by myself, and I used to dread getting up in the morning to see if she was still living; I was afraid of opening the door in case I found her lying dead on the bed. And all that time, nobody ever said: do you need help? Only for my parents I'd have been dead myself, 'cause there's no way I could have coped. Daddy and Mummy once told me there were days they would have been knocking my door at 8 o'clock in the morning, just to see if I was still living. And it was the same at night when they were leaving, they would say:"Will you be alright; now don't you be doing anything stupid." And that's the way you're left, on your own to cope.

We can share our problems now, when we get together. And we can identify with one another.

Yes, it's amazing, whenever you talk to everyone you find we've all been through the same thing and been left the same way.

I mean, we weren't even informed about the way the cases were going, or if there was anybody being brought in for questioning or anything. We were left in the dark and forgotten about. Once the funeral was over, as Mary was saying, you were just left behind closed doors with your own family. There wasn't one ever came, from the police or agencies or anything, nobody ever came to see if you were coping financially, if you were coping mentally, was there anything that could be done for you. And I was left to bring up our two children, one at seven months, and one a three-year-old, and I just had to get on with it, whatever way I could.

The different agencies didn't seem to want to know; you were just a number, you were just forgotten about, they didn't care, it was very sad.

And GPs just throw you a box of tablets.

I don't really think GPs are trained to cope with this type of grief. I find it's a case of: "How are you keeping? – Good." And then they go on to something else as quickly as possible. I just felt that in my doctor's practice anyway they didn't know how to cope with the way my husband died and there was a bit of embarrassment about it. Nowadays there's stress clinics and they seem to know more about it, but in those early years they just came in to your house, sympathised with you – and then gave you nerve tablets.

The media's habit of using footage of past murders was something which caused a great deal of upset.

I know one of the things that hits Thelma and Pearl every hard, is that every time there's an article or a documentary on TV their two sons are shown lying dead on the pavement.

Yes, the media's habit of using footage of past murders has caused a great deal of upset to those families concerned. You may be walking into the living room and are caught unawares. And when you see your son on TV lying dead you reach for the tablet bottle again. You just feel numb all over – no-one knows just what goes through you at that moment. It is like a bad dream. But in your heart you know that it is true. David will not walk through that door ever again; no kiss on the cheek, or "How are you, Mum?" He was a good son and people on both sides knew that he and John Graham were two good community police officers who did their job well.

That's something we have taken up with the police and others, for it must be something which really upsets many families.

We also lobby on different things. We have met Mr Ingram on a number of occasions; we went over to Brussels, and we spoke to people belonging to different groups, and I think they're all of the same opinion. I class myself as a forgotten victim. At the time of my husband's death our politicians were writing in the paper that 'this is terrible, something needs to be done', but that's a seven-day-wonder – after that there's nobody comes and says to you: did you need help or anything?

I think it takes years to get over it, to come to terms with it, and then you start getting a bit stronger. And I think that's what the group has helped with, building your confidence up. One voice going to these places doesn't mean nothing, but going as a group has more effect on them.

Difficult financial circumstances were an ongoing concern for the group members.

You're left fighting compensation claims on your own, but you don't really know what you're doing, because you're still that much upset, distressed really, after the murder. And if you've got young children – I had a boy five and a half, and one two and a half – and my husband is dead 27 years and I still have never got over it, and I don't think I ever will till the day God calls me. But the politicians have an awful lot to answer for, because they could have come out and done a lot more for victims; they just didn't want to know.

My son was a policeman, and the police welfare don't recognise mothers as victims. The wife and children are classed as immediate family, mothers and fathers are not.

The same with me: the solicitor said I couldn't claim anything because I wasn't depending on my son, but my husband had died the year before so who was I depending on? He was all I had at home, so he was.

Because I was getting the Widow's Pension I was 5 pence over the limit which meant I wasn't entitled to benefits. At that time there was school meals, you could have applied for help with uniforms and things, but I was 5 pence over and couldn't get any help.

I was 12p over. And, as you said, that cuts you out from school meals, prescriptions, everything.

I never got anything in 27 years, I never got Income Support in my life.

I was *3 pence* over the limit! The teacher in David's school told him: your mum's bound to get help with school uniforms, I'll fill in the form for you. And it came back saying: you're 3 pence over the limit.

My children's teachers did exactly the same, they said: you should apply for free school dinners, because most of the ones here are on free dinners. And I had to tell them that I did apply and I was just over the limit. So we have to pay for everything.

My widow's pension is £25 a week, that's what they give me to live on and they said it will be reviewed when I become an OAP. I am left with my mortgage. They told me that if I sold my house and was scrapping the barrel I would get whatever I want, but because I own my own house I get nothing.

All down the line widow women were always badly done by. If you take a young girl now only sixteen and who has a baby, she's kept, she gets a house, her rent, everything paid, and we can't get nothing.

I told them that I would have been better off as a single parent. And if the children go on to further education I'll have to pay for them, because they'll not be eligible for grants.

The woman who runs our post office called me over one day and says, "I hope you don't mind me saying this, but you're the only woman comes in here who gets so little money: why is that?" And I told her I was a widow, my husband was murdered. And she says, "I can't understand it; there's people coming in here and they're even getting an allowance for mobile phones. I'm sitting behind this counter and it would scare the living daylights out of you what they're getting money for, and I could never understand why you're only getting that much money." I told her that as long as I own my own house I can't get any more money, even though I'm still paying my mortgage.

And there's another thing I found very hurtful, when you go for compensation and you're meeting up with your solicitors and different ones. I was told that I "no longer had my husband to feed" – those are the exact words my barrister told me. He said they'll be counting up how much pension money you have, and family allowance, and I said but that wouldn't compensate for the loss of my husband's weekly wage coming in. And he says, "The way they look at it you no longer have your husband to feed or clothe."

They asked me my age. Ivan was 33, I was 30, and they said, "You're a young women, you could remarry." And that's 27 years now and I still haven't remarried and have no intention of doing so.

I was told, "You're able to go out and work." And I says, "Where am I going to get work? Who's going to give a job to anybody that's on sleeping tablets and nerve tablets?" I rattle with tablets!

I've never had a proper night's sleep since it happened.

You're made to feel like a beggar, you have to beg about compensation, and beg to get justice done. The most humiliating thing is to go to High Court and sit among them barristers, because as sure as anything they have the sum worked out before you're anywhere near the High Court.

The government doesn't understand what it's like to be left a widow – you haven't that extra money of your husband's coming in. The children are looking a new pair of shoes, somebody else up the road got a pair of shoes, maybe £50, but you're sitting there and you haven't got 50p. They don't stop to consider those things. It's a sad thing when they're offering you a claim and they turn round and say, "Well, you haven't your husband to feed any more." It's about time they were took to task on the little things as well.

Some say that there's no poor people now. But there is poor people, because if you're living on a pension, you can't afford to save because the price of electricity, coal, whatever, uses up all your money. You certainly can't save to take your children away on a holiday like other parents can.

When you're married, as the children grow up your financial situation gets better, if you know what I mean, when there's the pair of youse. But when you're left on your own, and that same income isn't there any more, and you're left to fend for your children, you don't go anywhere, you just sit at a certain level and you're just hoping that whenever they get to a certain age you'll be able to have money there for them.

Politicians came under strong criticism for allowing such a situation to develop.

Victims shouldn't have been left to chase up things themselves. Our cases have gone by default because of our politicians' lack of interest and effort. If these politicians were actively working for the victims, surely something should have been done about it by now? But it seems they couldn't care less.

In every aspect of life – financially, morally, legally – the politicians have let us down. They have also rubbed our noses in it by letting the prisoners out – and some of our loved ones' murderers will never even be at the court, so they'll not serve a minute.

There was also the long-term physical and emotional consequences of loss.

There is a ripple effect. Everyone only sees the immediate victim, but the number of cases where parents died within a short space of time, or illness develops, is widespread. We have three people suffering from cancer, and I have no doubt that in two of the cases it is related to the trauma of their loved one being murdered, without a doubt.

My son's girlfriend has never got over his murder, she was with him in the car at the time he was killed. But she never got any help either.

The youngest participant to the discussions remarked:

I think we all would have needed to talk. Nobody ever come near us... even your family doctor hadn't really an awful lot of time for you in them days. To be honest I don't even think I can remember six or seven months after it, I have sort of lost all that. I can remember my mummy sitting with a blanket round her on the chair, that's all I remember about her for a year. And she just lived on tablets. We wouldn't have dared mention anything to her.

Unnatural deaths

When it came to discuss the actual circumstances in which the group members' loved ones had died – something which it was agreed would form part of this document – numerous difficulties emerged.

It's still very raw, it's still very personal, so it is.

I'm sorry if I can't speak tonight, I'll try and write it down for you.

I don't even think I could write it down, I'd be sitting crying.

I couldn't talk about it at all.

No, me neither.

Some other members of the group were invited to come, but they said they can't talk about it openly at all.

This inability to discuss the circumstances of the death was not related to the distance in time of the event – the wife whose husband had died 28 years ago had as much of a problem speaking about it as the mother whose son had died only four years ago. This fact alone was a stark indication of just how deeply traumatic the events surrounding each death had been. One group member, who had participated in the first meeting, felt too depressed to attend subsequent meetings, although she had not regretted her earlier participation. For many, the sense of bewilderment was still very much alive.

Our loved ones were law-abiding citizens who went and did their weekly work and they worked hard for their families, and they were gunned down like animals – they weren't even given a chance. And the fact is that those who murdered my husband didn't even know him personally. And that is the legacy that I have to share with my family. I haven't

shared everything, the children don't know the half of it, because I just haven't had the strength to tell them. But that's what I have to tell my family when they come of age and I think they can cope with it.

As the deep-seated pain still felt by immediate family members – wives and mothers – clearly prevented them from opening up on this topic, it was left to the brother-in-law of a victim to take the first step in this direction.

My sister's husband was killed, shot down like a dog with two old pensioners he was standing talking to – one was 60-odds, the other was 72. I think the greatest shock of it for everybody was the sheer sectarian nature of the thing. My sister she's sitting in the car waiting for her son and daughter to arrive on the school bus, while her husband's standing talking to these two men. A car pulls up, two men jump out with AK-47 rifles, open fire, say nothing, just open fire on the three of them. My sister is sitting in the car, bullets fly through the car, just miss her, and within a couple of minutes the bus comes down, the two kids get off the bus, see their daddy shot dead, two pensioners lying there too, and their mother in hysterics and having nearly been killed herself. Anybody that knew him, or knew these other two man... in fact, one of these men had been featured on a television programme the night before, demonstrating how he made violins, and actually it was people from the other side of the community were buying them off him, like, for céilí groups and things. But the barbarity of the action itself was very hard for everybody to take in – three totally innocent men shot down like animals. And these thugs weren't even satisfied with the barbaric act they carried out but they cheered and laughed as they drove away. Yes, they actually laughed and howled like dogs, they thought it was a great victory shooting these three men.

The IRA issued a statement a few hours later exulting in the fact that, as they stated, they had just assassinated "three members of an active service unit of the UVF". Now, can you imagine a man of 72, a man who was nearly blind... In actual fact, old Ernie Rankin would have had to come right up to you and look into your face... big thick glasses, couldn't have seen you, would have needed to have been standing up against you to know who you were. This other totally inoffensive man, 60-odd years, and Leslie himself, 39. To claim that these men were members of a Loyalist paramilitary organisation... I mean, you can't scrape the barrel much deeper than that. It was just a blatant sectarian murder. When the IRA realised the horror it had provoked right across the community they then put out another statement, saying that: well, really, you know we didn't mean to kill the two old pensioners, we were only targeting Leslie Dallas. Well, if they were only targeting Leslie Dallas why would two gunmen with two AK47 rifles need to fire indiscriminately at a group of three people? Even the minority community recognised the act for what it was. Fr. Denis Faul said it

was only an excuse for sectarian murder. And Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich also recognised that it was sheer sectarian slaughter – he said he hoped that everyone would totally disown these people. The police commander at the time said the IRA claims were a pack of Republican lies, these were good upstanding citizens. And whilst the IRA took three lives, they destroyed the lives not only of Hazel, Leslie's wife, son and daughter, but the families of everyone concerned, because since then, I mean, they have all suffered, mentally... I think it's the mental anguish that they've gone through, and nobody on the Republican side has ever had the guts to say: "Sorry, it was a mistake, it shouldn't have happened." Church leaders, politicians, all agreed all the time that it was a terrible crime, a sectarian slaughter, but, as my sister said on the phone the other night to me: until this group [HURT] actually got in touch with her, nobody has ever bothered to do anything for her since Leslie's death – apart from MP Willie McCrea, who helped a great deal at the time – and she finds it very very hard, even to this day, to discuss it.

Then another member of the group gathered up the courage to recount her own horrific story.

Roy was murdered here in the house in front of me. He run an Army Surplus store in Lurgan and Wednesday was his day off. He had the habit, after his tea, of going down to the bedroom and lying on the bed. So this is what he did; he took his tea and lay down on the bed, and I rid up the dishes and went out to feed the two dogs. And whenever I am walking down the back of the house I have a habit of whistling, and I was whistling 'Amazing Grace'. And I heard someone whistling the same, so I stopped and they stopped. I started and they started again, and this continued as I came round the front of the house. The only thing I could think of was that it was Roy keeping me going, and I looked up at all the windows but could see no sign of him. I came in and went into the bedroom and he was sleeping on the bed and I shook him and says to him, "Roy, wake up; I'm out feeding the dogs and every time I whistle, there's somebody mocking me, and I want to know is it you? Answer me, tell me the truth." He turned round to me and he says, "Mary, you're cracking up." And at that, I thought it was him, so I went into the kitchen and sat cutting school photographs. Gail, she was thirteen then, came and says, "I'm going out to the garage for something, I'll only be a minute." She had a sort of den out in the garage, that's where she done most of her playing with her mates. I started to cut the photos and then I heard the back door opening and I thought it was Gail coming back in.

The next thing I got this poke in the back and when I turned round there was three men standing there, all dressed in army clothing. There was one he was standing with a sledgehammer in his hand and a small gun, and the other two were standing with big guns. The first thing that came into my head, with owning a shop, was robbery. And I just turned round and says,

"What're youse playing at!" And at that stage there was a phone on the wall and six cups sitting on the bench, and one of them ripped out the phone and flung it across the floor, and he just did the same with the cups. Like, this all happened in moments. And I turned round and the other two... I seen them running up the hall, and I knew then this was no robbery. I started to scream and shout, "Roy, Roy, Roy!" And the one with the gun on me said, "Don't you move or I'll kill you!" I jumped up and he said, "Stay you your ground or I'll shoot you!" And I was roaring and screaming, "Roy, Roy!" And whenever I was going up the hall I seen them, they were coming out of the sitting room. I had left Roy in the bedroom, but I had actually seen them standing shooting into the sitting room. And I run down the hall and the other boy he was shouting, "I'll kill you, I'll shoot you!" But the other two boys put their guns at me and told me to get back or they'd shot me. I was still screaming, "Roy, Roy, Roy!" And they said, "Right, we're going to kill you!" I said, "Please, don't!" – because at this stage I was thinking that Roy was still living, because I had left him in the bedroom, and I pleaded, "Please, don't!" and then I collapsed on the floor. And they trampled over me and as they left all I could think about was getting to Roy.

So I ran into the bedroom. But there was no Roy there, so I went into the sitting room, but I could see nothing, for the room was just full of smoke; it was just like a deep fog, you couldn't have seen that table in front of you. And I looked and couldn't see Roy anywhere, and thought he must be in the bedroom. So I run back into the bedroom and I was shouting all the time for him. But no sign of him there. So I ran back into the sitting room and at this stage the smoke had begun to clear and, just over in front of the TV, he was sitting there, slumped forwards. I run over to him and I could see that he was just riddled, but I thought he was still living. I was shouting at Roy, and there was a phone and I lifted it to ring the police and I says to myself: I'm stupid, 'cause they ripped the phone out up there. I was so confused I assumed all the phones would be off. So I jumped up quick, and I knew Gail was still outside, and the first thing now was to get an ambulance. So I run down the road to my neighbour's house and banged on her door. And she came out and I says, "Please, please phone the police and an ambulance quick, Roy's been shot!" She said to come on in, but I said, "No, please, just phone, I want to get back up before Gail reaches him. Follow me up." I came running back up and I met Gail and she was coming through the door with a hatchet in her hand. And I said to her, "Have you been down in that bottom room yet?" And she said, "No. Why, what's wrong?" And I said, "Don't, stay there; your daddy's been shot, don't follow me down!" But she did and started roaring and screaming, and I said, "Gail, would you try that phone." And I was holding him and she lifted the phone and she got through. I was holding him and my hands were going everywhere, trying to stop the blood. By the time the police

got from Lurgan to here – I'm sure it was about 15 or 20 minutes – they came into the room and they took Gail out. The ambulance men came in too and they came over to me to tell me he was dead. And I shouted, "He isn't dead!" But they took off their caps and said he was, and I said, "He isn't!" The police then took me out of the room. I learned afterwards why Gail had come in with a hatchet. She had been in the garage when she heard me screaming and this 'bang, bang, bang!' And she thought it was somebody trying to break down the door, and she locked the garage door and then when the screaming stopped – that was when I was away down the road – the first thing she thought of was to come in with a hatchet.

Her sense of grief and disbelief was still extremely real.

So that's the way it has left me, it's very very unfair. Roy, all he did was run his Army Surplus store, and he worked ... we built the business up, we bought the shop, we paid it off. And once we paid it off we bought the land here, paid it off too, and it was just work, work, work. And when he came in from work at night, he was never back out through the door. I said to the police, "Why did they pick Roy? Did they want the business, did they want the house, or what did they want?" And the police said, "No, they don't want anything, it's just another excuse to get shooting somebody; he was an easy target sitting out here in the country." And the IRA issued a statement saying that Roy was a member of some organisation, but at the inquest the police said that they had known Roy for years and he was a totally innocent man. The only reason was that they didn't like the Army surplus clothes that he sold, and that was the excuse for shooting him, because they detest anything to do with the 'Army', and that's why they shot him dead. And my life will never be the same.

For years I was relying heavily on sleeping tablets, nerve tablets, I was taking six nerve tablets a day, I was taking sleeping tablets. The sleeping tablets worked for two hours a night and that was all the sleep I was getting, and I couldn't stick it, so the doctor said: right, we'll get you another hour's sleep, and he gave me this tablet to take before I took my sleeping tablet and it did make me get another hour's sleep at night. But eventually I went back again and said I can't stick this, three hours is no good to me. I'm lying awake at night and it's too long, so he says right, we'll give you a stronger tablet. But the morning after I took the first of these new tablets I got up out of bed and just collapsed on the floor. And Gail came running in and says, "What's wrong with you!" And I couldn't even stand I was just completely in a world of my own, and I said to myself: well, that's it, I might as well be dead. And whenever Mummy and Daddy came down I said, "Those sleeping tablets; you talk about knocking out a horse – I just hit the ground like a shot." And Daddy says, "Right, Mary, that's far enough; you're going to have to stop that and try and avoid them." So I

bucked those ones into the fire. And it was after that that I tried to accept: right, three hours' sleep, that's all you're going to get, you're just going to have to put up with that. It probably took me about six years to get off the nerve tablets and sleeping tables, and Gail was the same: they put her on nerve tablets too. But the IRA ruined her life and they ruined my life.

My life will never ever be the same again; and as what John said, it wrecks the whole family. It destroyed my father; for the first time in my life I seen my daddy crying like a child. He was standing at the side of my house and he was saying, "Why, in the name of the Good Lord, did they murder that man? He was such an innocent, quiet fella; why did they pick that fella to murder!" And my dad never got over it; I will never get over it, Gail will never get over it, the whole family will never get over it; it just ruins everybody's life completely. For no reason whatsoever. The same thing again: never said sorry, nothing. There were times Gail was so upset I would have just loved to take her out of her bed and take her to wherever their house was and set her on the doorstep and say, "Can you do anything with that child, for that's the way I'm left with her!" That child did not want to live, and there's times I thought I would never see her alive again.

The impact on the children

The impact on the children could not only be devastating, it could add immeasurably to the anguish already being felt by the surviving parent.

I had an awful, awful time with that child. She had just turned thirteen and her whole school life was ruined. All she ever wanted to do was disappear into her bedroom, and any time I went in after her she shouted, "Mummy, close the door – out!" And she was just lying on the bed, tearing the hair out of her head: "I don't want to live, I want to be with my Daddy!" I was taking her to school in the morning, I was coming back and would hardly be in the door when the phone was ringing, and somebody from the school was saying, "Could you please come and collect your daughter from school, she's in the sick room." And this went on for I don't know how long, and the doctors had both me and her on nerve tablets. They sent us to a psychiatrist in Craigavon, and he could do nothing with us. He said that until we accepted that Roy was dead, we were going nowhere, but as we wouldn't accept it, he could do no more for us. I had to watch that child round the clock... and she would never go to the cemetery, or anywhere near it. Then after she turned 18 she started to come out of it a bit. But she would never talk about it or nothing, and then at that stage she started to come round, although I would say it has left her very, very bitter. She cannot understand why it happened to her daddy, for Roy was the apple of her eye.

With the discussion now focused on the impact on the children, the other members of the group began to participate.

> My 16-year-old daughter had to leave Lurgan Technical College, had to leave her education because she was being traumatised, every day, every day. At 16-years-of-age she had to leave school altogether, but there's nobody come to me and says: we'll educate her, we'll help her along the way, we'll do this, we'll do that. My daughter still has nightmares, still has them, but she has to get on with things. But she lost her education too. They drew ducks and guns on the wall of the College – they knew my husband was killed at Castor's Bay along with Beverely's husband; they were wild-fowlers. And the things they did to that child wasn't ordinary. A lot of them were day-release ones who came from Roman Catholic schools, and she went through an awful time. I did transfer her to Portadown College but by that time it was too late, she just couldn't cope any more, she just had to leave school. Thank God she's got a good job now, she's managed to pull herself together.
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> That's a common theme. You'll tend to find that the children's education has been wrecked – and it's something that the schools have never addressed even yet. They expect even after two weeks that children can return to class and just carry on as normal. Even in schools today there's still no mechanism for having somebody there to monitor the progress of kids like this. So in that sense we are no further on after 30 years.
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> The teachers at the school my boys attended sent for me and said they didn't know how to cope with my eldest son. He was maybe telling them, "I was dreaming about my daddy last night." And then the other children were shouting, "But you have no daddy!" Things like that. And I had to go down and talk to the teachers. One teacher sat and cried, and said to me, "I just don't know what to do with your boy."
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> It's always there, and as life goes on and things happen, with the children and things like that there, it's always there. You have nobody to share the enjoyment with, and they miss out so much on having a good father.
>
> You definitely don't want anyone else to go through what you go through; it's a terrible thing, you can't explain it. At the time of my husband's funeral you're just completely out of it. There were photographs of the funeral in the newspapers. Well, in one of them I seen my eldest boy walking behind that coffin, and to this day I can't look at that photograph, it upsets me every time. The other wee one was just in the pram at the time, but to look at that young lad standing there... there was a photograph of him standing at his father's grave... it's awful hard.

My son won't talk to me about his dad at all; he might talk to his mates, but he can't talk in the house. I have photographs of his dad in the house and sometimes I go in and he has them turned round; he can't bear some times even looking at his photographs. I remember when the youngest one started school and he brought home a picture he painted. And I said, "That's lovely, what's this?" And he said, "That's you, Daddy, David and me." And he said, "Would you put it away for when my daddy comes back home" – he thought his daddy was coming back home.

The teachers can't deal with bereavement, when children mention their fathers. I think everybody is walking on eggs, I think they're all scared.

I find that you have parents who won't talk in front of children and children who won't talk in front of parents, because they don't want to upset each other. You can see the depth it goes, and that's even with cases going back 25 years or more.

I would be different; my children talk about their daddy all the time, and even about the day it happened, and what happened, and where they were – we sit and we talk together.

My granddaughter will ask, "What happened to Uncle Colin?" And she never knew him, she wasn't born until after he died. And I just say. "Bad men killed him." She talks about him all the time.

It's very hard for the children at times like Father's Day, birthdays, school events...

Certain things can really affect them. Like, when they see other children going away to football matches with their daddies and they've nobody to go with – their uncles might not be interested in football. I could see mine looking at the other youngsters with their daddies, and you could see that forlorn look on their faces, and you knew they were thinking: I have no daddy. And I couldn't have done nothing; I just used to go into the back room and sit and cry 'cause I knew what was in their wee minds.

My sister's two children were doing well at school, and you can imagine what it must have been like for them; they got off the bus, walked round the corner and seen their daddy lying dead. Life became like a nightmare for them after that; I suppose that picture will always be on their minds for as long as they live. The wee girl was particularly bright; she got nine GCSEs and was hoping to go to university. She went back to school, but she had lost all interest and just left, couldn't face any more education. The wee lad was the same. They didn't see psychologists, or psychiatrists or anybody like that, and I think their mother just tried to cope with them the best she could. They have never, ever sat down and talked to me about their daddy's murder.

You're trying to cope with children while at the same time you're not well yourself. The children would maybe have been crying, the young boy used to shout, "I want my Daddy, I want my Daddy!" And I'm sitting at the bottom of the stairs, crying, couldn't go to him. So I phoned down for a neighbour and she used to come down and go up the stairs and sit with him. One was two and a half, the other one was five and a half, and I couldn't go upstairs near them, because there was no way I could even talk to them for crying.

It's like a knife turning inside you, every time they ask about him.

When they're small you're trying your best to look after them and trying to cope with your own grief. My ones were 19, 18, and 15, so I had company in them, they understood what had happened to their father. At the same time they were a help to me as I was to them, because we could talk together.

When they're young you protect them, you don't tell them the full horror of what happened. My girl was three at the time – the youngest was only seven months – and whenever she asked where her daddy was, I just said that God had taken him home, he's with God in Heaven. And that went on for a number of years, every time she would have asked, and I couldn't break down and cry because I didn't want... I wanted her to think that he was happy where he was and I didn't want to cry in front of her. And it took me years to get around to telling her what actually did happen, for I went around with this false face on while I was with them. And the children were with me all the time, they got really possessive, I couldn't go anywhere except they were with me. There always seemed to be that fear with them; if they did go out with granny, when they came back the first thing they would have said was, "Where's my mummy?" 'Cause she went to bed one night and the next day her daddy was gone and she never seen him again.

They were afraid of you going too.

I seen my one coming home and saying that the other children were shouting at him that he had no daddy.

In school, my daughter still had a memory of her daddy, she knew her daddy, whereas my son wouldn't have known his daddy. And at school, when the other ones were talking about their daddy, he pretended. In fact, the teacher called me in, she didn't really know what age he was when his daddy died, but the things he was saying seemed impossible. For example, if the other boys had been saying they did such and such with their daddy or whatever, he was saying, "Yes, so did I." And she called me in and asked me what age he was at the time and I told her seven months, and then she told me the things he was saying in the class, and I said he probably doesn't want to be the odd one out, for children can be cruel with one another.

I know my daughter copes with it by writing, she would write down different things, about what happened to her daddy and her loss, she writes it all down. She's thirteen now. And all her stories for school would be on the theme of criminals; no matter what essay topic she gets she turns it that it always ends with someone being brought to court. When I read them I sometimes wonder what type of home the teacher thinks she comes from! But it's always the same format – her essays always end with the criminals being taken to court. There was one occasion... she was eight years old and I can remember it as plain as... it was Christmas time and she was missing her daddy – stands to sense, when they see other children with them – and she turned round to me and said, "Well, are the bad men in jail yet?" And I said "No", and she said, "Well, why not?" What can you say to a child? And last year she went away for the weekend with the youth club. Now, two of her friends' fathers were involved with the youth club. When she came home she cried and cried. And I said there must be something up, I thought she and her friends had fallen out, but when I eventually got it out of her she says, "Mummy, it was just when I seen them with their daddies."

I can tell you a similar one. We have some teachers involved in the background, and one of them was telling me that they had a party of kids away, and they all got to stay in their own wee room, and this child, who is otherwise a very confident child, suddenly broke down and cried. But because of having worked with us this teacher could identify immediately what the problem was. It was the suddenness of that kid's father being taken out of his life; that insecurity was still there years later.

You were saying about the group: my children would befriend other children and they get a sense of fellowship that they're not the only ones, and our ones come back and say, "I didn't know such and such had lost their daddy, or their granda." And they sort of get comfort or something from that, to know that they're not alone. And that is something that has come out of the group, for my children anyway.

Their wedding day is just a nightmare, wondering where you're going to get the money to help them out, for rig-outs, wedding things; you would like to try to help them when they get a house. I cried the whole way through our David's wedding, I never quit crying, it was terrible. I cried for him and because his dad wasn't there for him – I cried for both of them. It should have been a joyous day, but it wasn't. My brother Jackie stood in for Ivan; indeed, if it hadn't have been for Jackie, my aunt and my sister-in-law, I don't know how I would have coped.

Their first day at school, and I can remember leaving her in school and walking away. And I hadn't an eye in my head, but you've nobody to share that enjoyment with, that they've started their first day. I know when the first one started walking, or got their first tooth, well, it was a whole topic: look, they're got their first tooth! But by the time my son reached those same stages my life had just fallen apart around me and I couldn't have cared less what was happening. I don't know how I got through it; well, I do, because my mum was that good to us. But I have lost those years, they've grown up now and I've lost all that. What should have been a happy time was robbed from us. I always said those murderers had the choice of being murderers, but whenever our loved ones were murdered they had no choice – their right to life was taken from them.

Prisoner releases and politics

The 'early release' scheme for paramilitary prisoners, an integral component of the Good Friday Agreement, had caused much upset to the group members. For a sizeable number of the families connected to HURT the hardest part to accept was not simply that persons convicted of murder were leaving prison before their sentences had been completed, but that those responsible for the deaths of *their* loved ones had still to be brought before the courts, and the early release scheme, with its clear overtones of amnesty, meant that such an eventuality was now highly unlikely.

It's disgusting, I don't think they should ever have been let out.

Them three men who murdered my husband has never been before a court, and I think myself they should be made pay the penalty. I've been told who they are. They've families of their own; I often wonder how do they sleep, how do they look at their wives, how do they look at their children? If their families had've seen the way I was left here, the way my husband was left in a pool of blood in front of me and me left cradling him in my arms, what would they think about what their husbands did? I wouldn't even call them human beings, a vulture wouldn't even do what they done on me.

They're the scum of the earth!

What kind of 'heroes' need three guns and a sledgehammer to shoot one man sitting in his front room and then walk out that door laughing. I prayed for my life in that hall, they stamped over me as if I was dirt and I feel angry that the politicians could decide to release the same kind of murderers. If

it had happened to the politicians, how would they have liked it? Would they have liked their wives and children to be left the way we were all left?

There was a young man murdered a few months ago from the same batch of bullets that killed David and John. The IRA will never stop their killing.

And would they like to see the murderers of their loved ones still walking about the streets, like we do?

God forgive me if it ever happens, but if I was strong enough and the Lord was telling me he was taking me home in three weeks' time, there's a part of me would love to go to their door and do to them what they done on me. It's terrible what they've brought me to, for that's not like me at all – it's just the way they've left me. It would be justice in my heart because nobody else will give me justice – I'll do it myself. It's wrong that they should be let out. And I told Adam Ingram that if they had've put the ones that murdered my husband away – and there's no mistake about it that they could have done it if they had wanted to – all these women sitting here: there's one, two, three, four women wouldn't have been sitting here today as part of this group, their husbands or sons would have still been living, because once they had murdered my husband they went out and murdered all *their* loved ones too. They raked the country murdering, that one gang, and if they had put them away whenever they murdered my husband, all their loved ones would have been alive today, instead of being buried in the same graveyard. It's all round Roy's graves that their loved ones are buried too, all lying together – and the same mob killed them all.

And like that wee girl, I'm sure you've read about it in England [Sarah Payne, a murdered 4-year-old]; they've lifted that fella [chief suspect] four times and now they've charged him, and they're not going to let him go, which is right. Well, they could do the same here, they should be hounding and hounding the ones here, but they don't bother, they don't want to. If I walk up the street, and this is no word of a lie, if I walk up the street in Lurgan them men that murdered my husband can stand and laugh at me. But if I walk into the police station and say, "Look, why are they allowed to laugh at me?" the police just say, "We can do nothing about it." The police even told me, "Don't you put a hand on them because you'll be up before the court." So that gang can murder my husband and be let laugh at me when I walk up the street, yet if I hit one of them a smack across the face the courts can do *me* – yet nobody can do *them* for murder! There's something seriously wrong. And now they're going to let ones just like them back onto the streets. But those types are not going to stop killing, they're just like wild animals, they've got the taste of blood and they will just go on and on killing.

I know how you feel. It *is* hurtful when you see them walking up the main street. I met the man who murdered my husband walking up Lurgan Street and I'm telling you, it was an awful experience.

One bullet wasn't enough for my son; they put thirteen into him. A high-ranking army officer told me the day after my son got killed that he knew who killed him, but they couldn't do nothing about it. I never went out of the house for nearly two years after it, for my husband had just died the year before. And certain ones tormented my son's girlfriend every time she went up the town – they tormented that girl. She has never got over that, and that's ten years ago, so she hasn't. He was sitting with her at the time; she was lucky she didn't get killed. And I'll never forgive them. People say you'll eventually forgive them but I'll never forgive them till the day I die.

I never will either.

They don't ask for forgiveness anyway. You have to ask for it before you receive it and they don't think they've done wrong; they're running about with their heads in the air.

And even when the murderers get out, they've coming out with a full education, they're coming out with more money, big houses, and all the rest which we haven't got. Why should murderers get all that?

This situation wouldn't be tolerated in any other part of the British Isles; they wouldn't have let the whole thing go on for thirty years the way it has here.

And Sinn Féin/IRA are always saying we've had six years' ceasefire and Kelly and Mr Adams keep saying that, and there's nobody contradicting them. Yet our boys were murdered four years ago – in 1997.

While the majority of the group are largely unpolitical – concerned more with their personal traumas – a political analysis was indeed voiced.

My sister is still traumatised, even now, and it happened in '89. I would say that if I went to collect her tonight she couldn't come to this meeting, she never got over it. But I blame the British government, and I blame local politicians – they're not interested in the tears of these people. It is political expediency which underlies the suffering of these people. Tony Blair doesn't want another Canary Wharf, he doesn't want another Manchester, he doesn't want any more bombs on the mainland. As long as it's those ignorant 'Paddies' over there, sure what odds? They don't care about these people sitting here, they are more interested in appeasing gunmen and bombers – because they pose the biggest threat. They're not talking about compensating or doing the decent thing towards widows and

orphans, all they're talking about is how to engage these people, get them to play footsie under the table. Somehow it doesn't matter any more about right or wrong, morality or immorality. But the reality is that their efforts will fail, for it'll all come round full circle again.

Anyway, things haven't really changed much; they're still sitting in this new Assembly cutting another's throats – where's the change in that?

And they'll not hand one gun over – if the government thinks they'll hand guns over they have another thought coming. They're rubbing our noses in it. These people killed our loved ones and now they're took by the hand.

One of the group's organisers felt that government urgently needed to take account of the widespread feelings of injustice increasingly evident among victims.

The big danger at the moment, as I see it, is the total alienation felt by people, about all the immorality of what's being done. I think government agencies and government bodies for a long time now have tried to put their heads in the sand and pretend they don't see that alienation. I think there is certainly a policy of appeasement. So much of the work that we do on the ground is entirely non-political, has got nothing to do with politics, but the reality is that there is a sense of exclusion there becoming more and more evident. We even find it especially among young people; you'll not even get them to the likes of meetings like this, because their view is: well, with people like Martin McGuinness as Education Minister, violence obviously pays. And that is becoming more and more of a theme, that violence has been seen to pay, and I think it is becoming very hard to talk to young people about the difference between right and wrong. People in positions of authority have to address the exclusion we all feel, and the double standards in justice. We've heard now for a long time about the Bloody Sunday enquiry, or the Pat Finucane and Rosemary Nelson cases – but nothing about any of our cases. There has got to be equality of treatment, and that is sadly lacking at the moment. It's not that government haven't been told the difficulties and the problems, but I think there is a political agenda, and therefore people want to put their heads in the sand and pretend it's not taking place.

The young ones now are sitting back saying: all these men who killed and bombed and murdered, where are they today? They're sitting with big jobs, it has paid them to do this. Sure they got their education in jail, while our children were deprived of the most important years of *their* education.

My fear is that the things that are being done as part of the 'peace process' will ultimately undermine it. Look at the Israeli/Palestinian

peace process, a ten-year process, which has gone all wrong. Israel is now led by one of their most hardline politicians. Anybody can see that in five years' time the DUP and Sinn Féin are going to be the two largest parties in Northern Ireland. The middle ground will have diminished and it's because, I believe, of the instability created by the so-called 'peace process'. There's no-one here doesn't know that the government was trying to do the long draw here with Sinn Féin/IRA; they didn't want bombs on the mainland and they hoped that they could buy them off and draw them in. And the same with the Loyalist paramilitaries. But look at the way criminality and drugs are increasing. We are looking at a Mafia developing here, slowly but surely, in large parts of the country. I come from a rural area about four miles away and for the first time ever they had to set up a Neighbourhood Watch, because nearly every other house has been burgled, including my father's, in the last twelve months. That lawlessness is spreading right across, and I think it is coming from the political system, people's confidence is so bad, it has been undermined, they don't know where to look.

People will say: well, you know, those victims, these survivors, well, really that's all in the past now, we must look to the future. We would *all* like to look to the future, but I don't think anybody can learn any lessons for the future if we don't consider what happened in the past. Victims have by and large been shunted to the one side, and as an act of outright expediency, British governments, of whatever hue, over the years have worked tirelessly to appease those who took the lives of all these men and hundreds and hundreds of others. Now, we would *all* like to see a prosperous, peaceful, happy country, but if it's based on appeasement of what's wrong, I personally feel they are building a house on sand, it will never stand. And to take people into government and to conjure up a system of government which facilitates those with murderous intent I don't believe it can survive in the long run. I would say, my sister would say, her son and her daughter would say, and the family circles would say, that governments have utterly failed the people of this country. They try to appease the person that has the largest capability of inflicting violence or murder. They dress it up in political language, but at the end of the day, all it is is appeasement. The politicians, here and in London, have betrayed the dead, they have taken the murderers under their wing, into government. They have tramped over the graves of innocent dead people, and they have nullified anything that was decent in this country.

They're expecting people to forget about it. To keep quiet.

I get very angry when I see Gerry Adams on television, all the attention he gets. I will be honest, I see him as responsible for my husband's death. He mightn't have done it with his own hand but he represents those who did.

I would be the same towards Gerry Adams, but I would also be the same towards the Unionists, the DUP, all of them, for not sticking up for us.

They come at the time of the murders for media purposes and they're shown at the funerals, but they never darken your door since.

The IRA ruined my life and the lives of my children, they have left an awful lot of heartbroken, devastated homes. And what for? What good did it ever do anybody? None!

My daughter couldn't get over her brother's death – she had lost her father and her only brother within two years. We miss them so much, even to this day. I thank God that I have my daughter, her husband and my grandchildren to get me through each day, and that I have so much love to give them in return. I pray every night that God will punish those evil people who killed my only son.

Problems with funding

Like many community-based organisations, HURT was greatly limited in the support activities it could embrace because of lack of funding.

We run a range of projects at the moment. We are working on the question of justice – as a human rights issue – for within the group you have many unsolved murders, going back 26 years. We're constantly lobbying people – here, London, Dublin, Brussels. We even visited the Libyan Embassy – we have four people in this room tonight killed by Libyan weapons: the net result of the American air strikes on Tripoli is in this room tonight, and no politician has ever said that, but that is the reality. There is also a lot of youth work going on. The members of our group live all over the place: Lisburn, Magheralin, Lurgan, Portadown, Banbridge, Gilford, Scarva... but we haven't got the manpower to work with them all, we need another outreach worker. We had three full-time staff funded through NIVT, Peace & Reconciliation. But we need funding to keep us going until 'Peace II' comes in. And it would be nice to have our own office and drop-in centre.

Brussels sent in money to help with the conflict, yet 'Peace I' never really came near the victims, other than crumbs off the table. Brussels told us that the faults don't lie with them but with the funding bodies back here.

Brussels didn't realise that the funding wasn't coming to us; in fact, they were shocked to hear about the lack of support for victims here.

However, a major problem with trying to get funding is that some of the funding bodies have their own agendas, they have political favourites and cronyism is rife, and that presents real difficulties for victims' groups.

Last week there was what they called a policy-makers and fund-raisers meeting – and no victims' groups from any of our sector were asked along. It was really the funding bodies making their own pitch for part of the big training budget that's apparently coming in under 'Peace II'. They're trying to make out that people who are on the committees of victims' groups aren't really up to the job, so *their* expertise is required to train these people. But ask any of these women sitting in this room what their experience with the funding bodies has been like? It's been horrendous. And as for this so-called 'expertise'...?

It's the usual story: whenever there's a real need it's not the people who are experiencing that need who are given the job of fulfilling it but all these outsiders, people who have no direct experience of the problem whatever.

Unless you have lost a loved one through murder you can't really talk about what it's like, you have to experience that yourself.

Even losing a loved one through illness or a car accident is different, totally different. I lost both my parents and it's not the same, and they both died sudden; but see when a person is murdered, you can't explain how you feel.

Apart from suspecting funding bodies of trying to grab their own slice of the funding cake, they had also found certain organisations openly hostile.

We found Mr Ingram very sympathetic, and he will listen to us. But there are others who are quite different. One of the most frustrating things we have found, right from the start of our lobbying, is that there's certain individuals who try to impress their superiors in the civil service by giving the perception that our group is an anti-Agreement group. Now, obviously there's nobody here who is going to support prisoner releases or support an amnesty for unsolved murders, but these civil servants try to use this fact as confirmation that we are anti-Agreement. People are put into this 'yes/no' category and if you don't agree with certain aspects of the Agreement then you're assumed to not want the whole thing, to not want society to move forward. But that's not the case; I personally believe there are

many good things which could take place with a devolved Assembly here, with decent people in it from both communities. Anyway, politics is actually one issue which is never discussed by us, 'cause there's too much 'bread and butter' stuff going on on the ground, too much genuine lobbying for compensation, funding, for redress, and work on human rights issues. But during a meeting with this senior civil servant from the Victims Liaison Unit one of our group must have said something, I can't remember exactly what, which sounded to him like politics. And he turned round and said, "Ah! I thought you weren't political!" His manner showed that it was quite obvious he had been just waiting for something to pounce on – he wasn't really listening to our other concerns.

During that meeting he also came out with a surprising remark, which only confirmed to us that he was mainly interested with trying to impress the minister. It came about when we were trying to explain to this man that victims' groups needed to have access to a handyman, maybe as a core worker – someone who could to respond to problems over plumbing and things like that. Every day you face problems around the house which, if there's no-one there to sort them out for you, can develop into a big issue. I happened to say to him that even a simple thing like a leaking tap could create problems, especially if you had no husband there to fix it for you. And he turned round and said, "Well, I fix my mother's taps." Now, the obvious snappy answer would have been, "Well, if you were shot dead, who would fix your mother's taps then?" But decency and good manners prevented it.

It wasn't just that: he stunned us with that remark – we were left speechless. To him it might have seemed a ludicrous request, but to victims it was a genuinely felt need – a handyman would have been a real asset to the group, indeed to all the groups. But it was the put-down aspect of his attitude which stuck with us.

However, the group members felt there were broader problems underlying funding inequalities.

I honestly believe that what the government was doing here with 'Peace I' was a fraud; they took in 'conflict money' from Europe, and they put that money into everything but the victims' sector. And then whenever victims raised their heads to say they'd like access to this funding, that's when the funding bodies, as I see it, played very high and mighty, and are now jockeying to get their chunk of the giving of it out, without looking at where it is meant to go, which is to grassroots groups. Now I understand why they want to reintegrate ex-prisoners,

I personally haven't got a problem with that, but there should be at least twice as much funding going into the victims' sector. No way can 'Peace II' go by the board because of people who think they know better than the victims themselves. Victims are entitled to it, that's who Brussels wants the money to be given to: schemes that help with education, work, employment... The number of people who are employed in the sector who are actually victims is so small it's an embarrassment, and I think the ethos of this group will remain that we want jobs for victims on the ground, and training and help with education.

We didn't make ourselves victims, it was imposed on us, through them murdering our loved ones, and yet it is the prisoners who have been taken by the hand, and they've been given education and employment, and if there's anything to be had they'll have it, and we have nothing.

We talked at the last meeting about the difficulties we all have faced getting compensation; and what has been awarded has usually been pathetic. Following a recent botched police operation down at a bar trying to catch this particular gang of IRA men, there's at least 150 people putting in claims, even though I think only 70 people were in the bar at the time. And there's probably not one of them who are not going to get compensation which will be vastly superior to what the majority of us got. That's how ridiculous the system has become. Sure didn't Gerry Kelly receive £9000 for getting hit by a policeman, and he got £4000 last year as well. There's no justice in the system.

As I said, we never get into politics, but you'll find that people on the ground know more about real politics than the politicians. If you put a politician in here now, the people sitting here would leave them streets behind.

People like us have had to confront all the important issues. What is peace? What is morality? What is justice? These are terms which are just bandied around among politicians, but we've had to face them for real in our daily lives.

Another aspect that never gets looked at at all is the church leaders – total neglect, total neglect. Many of the people here are regular churchgoers, but the established churches have failed completely. So, there's educational failure, statutory body failure, medical failure, government failure, security failure, church failure – it is a sad state of affairs.

The whole area has been one of neglect, and if nothing else, the prisoner releases triggered people to get up off their backsides. Work is needed

at the ground. You don't need eleven people sitting up at Stormont in a wee room in the Victim Liaison Unit coming up with schemes. You don't need that. All they need to do is listen to people telling them what's needed on the ground, that's where they will see results.

One of my biggest frustrations is that funders are responsible educated people, yet I cannot understand how these people, in control of millions – money supposedly earmarked for the conflict – could have missed the victims' sector. And it is especially frustrating from the children's point of view, because we all know what it means to children, be it computer courses, sports, events, trips, even the walks, things like that. You can't do all that unless you get some sort of funding; you can try to do it but it's all haphazard.

The absence of justice

It was the lack of personal justice which was the group's overriding concern.

We have lost the ultimate – our loved ones lost their lives. And government rub our noses in it by not keeping the murderers inside, or, in a lot of our cases, haven't even managed to bring them anywhere near the courts yet. And there's no chance of them ever serving a minute of a sentence; in fact, I'm sure that in times to come they might even be sitting in the Assembly, who's to know? They have just rubbed our noses in it.

The only ones who are really doing life sentences are ourselves.

Until the day we die.

We have to carry it to our graves.

How are we to tell young ones that they always have to do what's right in life, when they are seeing the people who have murdered and bombed sitting up in the Assembly in high positions and telling *us* all how to live our lives.

Look at the number of police on the Rosemary Nelson case. At the last count there was 82 detectives working on that case, and all brought over from the mainland, and the money it cost to bring them over here, and to keep them here. Now, her family deserve to have the killers caught, but so do we. What's the difference between that case and any of ours?

Look at all the attention given to Bloody Sunday, then compare that with La Mon and Bloody Friday. There's been 302 policemen murdered and how many have committed suicide and died, maimed, legs blown off, arms

blown off and not one thing said about it. Do you ever hear anything on the TV about them?

But even the civilian population – in both communities – are being neglected as well. There's no extra policemen being drafted in to look at their cases.

They don't even try any more, it's just swept under the carpet.

There is a big problem with inequality at the moment, there's no question about that: inequality in funding, inequality in justice.

There hasn't been one major massacre resulting from IRA violence solved in 30 years, so when people talk about the greatest police force in the world, I think there is a big element there of sympathy for the families of the policemen that died, but not with respect to what has been achieved over the 30 years as far as results go. And that's a reality that even surprises people in the agencies and statutory bodies, for they're only realising now how many murders weren't solved. And the frustration felt by people who had waited 25 years, like June here, for somebody to be arrested and charged, always hoping at the back of their minds that at some stage somebody would be called to account.

I mean, all round the country victims were told the police knew who did it and it would only be 'a matter of time'. I have met victims from different areas, and they were all told the same. And yet nobody has ever been charged for most of these murders, so this was a saying that was just used to pacify people.

I had told my daughter that bad men had killed her daddy. And when she was eight she says to me, "Mummy, are them bad men in jail yet?" Like, when an eight-year-old knows that when you do wrong you have to be punished for it, and I had to turn round and say "No". And when she asked, "Why not?" I said, "Well, they couldn't get enough evidence on them to put them in jail." And she just says, "That's not fair." The children have been left to carry that for the rest of their lives, not seeing justice being done. I mean, there is no justice for the decent, law-abiding citizens of this country, it's just for those who do wrong. And what type of society are we showing our children?

One member of the group who could not attend because of illness – sadly, she died during the period of the meetings – nevertheless asked for the inclusion of this comment:

I have prayed morning and night to see justice done, and have true peace, not only for the sake of my children and grandchildren but for all those who lost their loved ones and never saw justice done.

A shared sense of grief

Despite the bitterness the group members clearly felt towards the IRA, they held no bitterness towards the Catholic community; on the contrary they expressed a genuine sympathy for Catholic families left equally bereaved by Loyalist killers.

> There's nobody here wouldn't have good Catholic friends. In fact, we have some Catholic members of the group, but because we have police and UDR on our executive they don't want it to be publicly known that they are associated with the group because they would be fearful for their safety in their own community. We try to include them with the likes of memorial forms and such, we will go out and help them in whatever way we can. And these people would be coming from an innocent Catholic background who were maybe the victims of sectarian killings. There is nobody here who wouldn't have Catholic friends.
>
> I have very good Catholic friends. I had a phone call tonight from a Catholic girl before I came out, enquiring how I was keeping and how the boys were keeping, and that's maybe once a fortnight that girl rings me.
>
> My son was a community policeman, and last year there was this lady at his grave leaving flowers. We didn't know her and the flowers just said, 'To John and David.' My oldest boy happened to be there at the time and he went over to her. She was a Catholic woman, and she said that both John and David had helped her once when she was in trouble, and she felt she wanted to leave flowers for them. And Edward was going to take her home, but she said if he were to be seen leaving her home, some of the people around where she lived would make her life not worth living.
>
> My husband was working in the Kilwilkie estate; he was working as a postman at the time, and I still have contact with people that live in Kilwilkie – indeed, it was only yesterday that I was speaking to one of them. And for me I'll never stop speaking to these people, because they didn't do anything, it was the IRA murdered my husband, not the ordinary Catholic people. And I also have Catholic friends in Teghnevin.
>
> We participated in a cross-community activity recently, and our children made good friends there. And it's not the case that our children don't want to speak to Catholic children; they ran about playing with them. I thought it was great for them, for where I live it's a Protestant estate so they don't see any Catholics really, but on that trip they were able to play with each other, and it was great, like. I'm all for that kind of thing.

When our sons died the Gárda Síochána flew their flag at half mast, and there was people came out at the whole front of the police station. There was candles, everything, and Mass cards sent to us for David and John, because they were that well thought off within the whole community. Now, there's Gárda McCabe, he was murdered, and his wife wrote to us and said she will fight to the very end and she will never let her husband's killers get out; she'll keep them in prison for as long as she can. She said she couldn't live with it if they were allowed to walk out on the streets the way they do in Northern Ireland.

My husband was reared round the Catholic community and an awful lot of Catholic people come to my home when he was murdered, an awful lot of them, and I still would hear from them. And I know they care, I know that, but at the same time they're afraid to speak out. But I know how they feel; I know when they see me and they speak to me that they're genuine.

Yes, you can always tell whether people are genuine, or just being sympathetic for talk's sake.

A few days before one of the group discussions a Lurgan man, with an alleged Republican past, was gunned down by presumed fellow Republicans. Rather that this being a cause of any jubilation, the group members responded to the incident with sympathy and concern for the man's family.

I never slept the whole night, waiting to hear who it was; and it didn't matter to me what community he came from, a life is a life and that life had been taken.

And there was nothing of the funeral shown on TV, nothing. Maybe that's a sign of how cheap life has become here.

According to the weekend papers he is meant to have killed three people – it's a full-page story – but it could be totally nonsense. Certainly the man's image is smeared now anyway, whether it was true or false.

The media can say or write whatever they want about a dead person, and I think that is very wrong. They can say whatever they want, and there's not a thing you can do about it.

No matter who he was, he was somebody's son.

Solidarity in grief

The strength which the group members drew from each other was their most important asset, and one which was very much needed.

For me, time makes no difference – it still hurts so much.

We'd be lost without this group. I would be, I would be lost without it. You know that there's always somebody on the end of a telephone. Sometimes you just need to hear a reassuring voice. Like today: I wasn't feeling too good today, and I was speaking to Gareth, and after speaking to him I was able to get up and wash my hair and get ready for this meeting. It gave me a lift, and that was only through talking on the phone.

And Mary too, she would be there at the other end of the phone if you needed help, needed to talk, needed a lift to the hospital, which I have done a few times. We get together, we talk together.

Gareth came to our door at Christmas with a hamper of groceries, and it was just like a Godsend that somebody thought about you, that somebody was thinking about you.

To this day I have nightmares, and I mean terrible, terrible nightmares. It used to be every night screaming, yelling. I was lucky whenever I had Gail here with me; she would come in and waken me. If there's nobody there to waken you, you have to scream and yell and you hurt yourself. I told Mummy and Daddy that if ever I am got dead in bed it'll be because of a nightmare, because of the pain across my chest and down my arms with me screaming, trying to get myself woke. It's okay whenever there is someone there to waken you, you don't get to yell as long. During the day you have plenty to do, you can pass yourself, but whenever your head hits the pillow it's all going through your mind again. And you're thinking about what you would do to the killers, and there's your heart going like the clappers, your mind's never relaxed. To this day – even though Roy's dead twelve years – to this day I do have nightmares, and I mean very, very bad nightmares.

You're left in a living nightmare; I know I'll never, to the day I die, I'll never get over it. I have to live with it, but I'll never ever get over it. There's not a day goes past, it's there all the time, no matter what you go to do, it's there, you're living with it, it does not ever go out of my head, and your life's ruined. You go on, you have to go on, but it's just a living nightmare.

They're always in your thoughts.

And the least wee thing: if you go up the town and you see a man and wife looking in the shop window, it just hits you – that's something I can't do. You just feel: there's a man and wife, they're happy, and here's me left on my own. Same at Christmas, you see a woman buying a present for her husband and it's terrible, you feel: why am I left like this? I can't do these things; that hurts me a lot too.

If only they could see what they've done to you, the way they leave you, to me they just leave you a walking zombie. And not one of them has ever said they were sorry; at least if somebody repented about what they had done, said: look, we made a mistake...

Unless you come through it yourself, you can't explain it to anyone, 'cause I lost my mother and father, both at a young age, and I can accept their deaths, because my father had a heart problem, my mother hadn't been well for years. But when somebody comes and tells you that your husband has been murdered you can't explain what you feel, you don't even want to live with it, it's that bad.

You always try to hold on to a keepsake that will always remind you of them. In my case Ivan had an awful habit of wearing a cap when he cycled to work, and every time I open the drawer that cap's there; I wouldn't part with that cap. I just keep it beside the bed, and every time I open that drawer I see that cap and feel the hurt all over again. But there's no way I could ever put it away.

And another hurtful thing I find. You go out to enjoy yourself, you meet new friends, you might meet a man friend, and even if you're only talking to him people make a big issue out of it: they seen you out, you were smiling, they think everything's great. But see when you go home and you close that door... I remember the first time I felt able to go on holidays, and when I came home the car stopped at the front door, and it was just terrible the feeling that came over me. And you just sit and cry, because the house seems so empty.

Yes, every time you walk through that door you know there's an empty chair. It's different if they had died of natural causes, but when they have been taken from you in such a brutal way it's hard to cope with that; and nobody can really help you, you have to learn to live with it. You have to go on for your children's sake, because they have lost one parent and you can't let them lose another one.

And it's no different no matter how many years. It stays with you the whole time.

It was a Monday morning when my son was murdered, and every Monday morning I just . . . at a quarter to twelve I know my David was lying on the street then, and it's every Monday... and if the sun's shining it's worse again, I close all the blinds so as to keep the sunshine out, for it brings it all back – to this very day.

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Self-help at the grassroots

How communities responded to the Northern Ireland Troubles

compiled by

Michael Hall

ISLAND 90 PAMPHLETS

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Introduction

The recent handful of Island Pamphlets undertaken under the auspices of *Farset/ Inishowen & Border Counties Initiative* have focused on the largely unrecorded efforts made by grassroots community groups to not only counter the traumatic impact of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles', but to reach out to other communities in an effort to create better understanding, as well as engage those communities in purposeful debate and dialogue. Feedback at a grassroots level to these pamphlets has been positive. However, some of that feedback has clearly revealed that while people knew there was an amazing amount of work 'going on in the background', just *what* was going on was largely hidden from public view.

And yet, at a recent community-awards event (for the PATCH programme linking East Belfast and Drogheda) held in Parliament Buildings, Stormont, Peter Robinson, Northern Ireland First Minister, admitted that if individuals and groups in the community had not persevered in the often difficult work of building bridges between people – in order to break down fears and counter misperceptions – then the politicians would never have been able to move forward. It was a welcome, if somewhat belated, affirmation from the political leadership of this remarkable grassroots achievement.

Some readers who admitted that they had been unaware of the amount of creative work undertaken at the grassroots went further, and asked that we supply more details on the development of grassroots activism, and how it sought to respond, at times of great adversity, to people's everyday needs. It was to provide a partial answer to such requests that it was decided to present here a brief account of some of the more dynamic community initiatives which emerged. I say 'partial' because limitations of space make this a far from complete survey. Only a handful of projects have been described; there are countless others which could fill any number of these pamphlets. Perhaps some day a much fuller account can be written.

As the reader will see from the examples chosen, grassroots activism was never static – it was always forging ahead in its search for solutions. For example, groups located in either the Shankill or the Falls initially tended to their own needs, quite understandably, but eventually realised that those needs could only be adequately addressed by working across the 'divide'. Likewise, individuals and community groups in the border counties of the Republic of Ireland realised that they too could play a vital part in bringing the estranged communities 'up North' together, and especially help rid the Unionist/Loyalist community of their misperceptions about people south of the border. Few of these community-based efforts worked in isolation; links were forged – whether cross-community within Northern Ireland or cross-border – long before our assorted politicians took their first tentative (and often begrudged) steps in that direction.

Michael Hall, Farset Community Think Tanks Project

1969-70

This is what some have called the 'fire-fighting' period. The advent of the Troubles and the rapidly escalating violence not only came as a terrible shock to the communities most affected, but at times almost paralysed the normal functioning of society. The police were unwelcome in certain areas, ambulances found access to some estates difficult because of the numerous makeshift barricades which had been hastily thrown up for self-defence, domestic rubbish could not be collected, and refugees could not be rehoused quickly enough (at the start of the Troubles 1,800 families either fled or were forced to flee their homes; at that time this was the largest enforced movement of population Europe had seen since the Second World War). It was left to local people in their different communities to look to their own needs. While some individuals were more concerned with defence – and retaliation – and flocked to the paramilitary organisations in their hundreds, others sought to tackle the multitude of problems threatening to swamp their increasingly dislocated and traumatised communities.

1970s

In response to local needs, small community groups began to emerge and do what they could to ameliorate the worst effects of the daily conflict. The needs of the displaced were catered for as much as was possible; young people were taken away from troubled areas on brief holidays; and action was demanded on the poor social conditions (Northern Ireland then had some of the worst working-class housing conditions in Western Europe). And all this was largely accomplished 'hand to mouth', as funding was non-existent. Occasionally, money was supplied by a small number of local benefactors or international organisations.

Some of the community-driven initiatives were remarkably successful, such as the 'Save the Shankill' campaign which, for the first time, forced government agencies to take on board the concerns of local people. A few community efforts assumed a radical form: co-ops were established to provide food on a non-profit basis; there were even tentative attempts to create new forms of participatory democracy. But these radical initiatives usually floundered under the impact of the ongoing violence: people's minds were concentrated on more life-threatening issues.

The Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission, which had been set up under the chairmanship of Dr Maurice Hayes, and which sought to employ a community development strategy to deal with the increasing levels of inter-communal violence and disaffection between government and governed, was closed down by the short-lived power-sharing Assembly of 1974.

1980s

As people began to realise their strength 'community activism' began to burgeon, and soon hundreds of community projects, groups and initiatives were springing up everywhere: from poverty campaigns to radical theatre groups. The 'community sector', which had been largely driven by voluntary effort, began to receive major funding support from government. On the one hand this helped to consolidate the efforts being made, but on the other it created divisions between volunteers and those now getting paid for doing the same work. Furthermore, the need to conform to agendas set down by the funding bodies, and the fact that some of the funding was channelled through 'respectable' agencies such as the churches, gradually saw the demise of many radical grassroots initiatives. Nevertheless, community work had definitely moved from its initial 'fire-fighting' phase into one of consolidation.

Government set up the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, but, unlike the Community Relations Commission of 1969-1974, its initial emphasis was on reconciliation rather than community development, an emphasis shared with the majority of local and external funding bodies.

1990s

The next stage after consolidation was regeneration, and community organisations now, for the first time, lifted their gaze and began to look to the future. Much of the positive and productive work done at a grassroots level fed into, and helped to consolidate, the growing 'peace process'. However, there were still many problems. For example, increasing professionalisation of community work was seen as a bonus to some but a handicap to others: local people who had worked tirelessly for their communities often could not take up the jobs which began to appear due to lack of the required qualifications.

Victims' self-help groups also began, at long last, to meet some of the personal and social needs of those who had suffered the loss of loved ones; in the 1970s and even into the 1980s victims' needs had gone largely unsupported, even unacknowledged. Cross-border work also began to build up a remarkable momentum, and found a surprisingly receptive response among Protestant/Loyalist working-class communities.

2000s

In the 1990s a major investment had been made in Northern Ireland by the EU through its 'peace funding'. While this greatly assisted much of the work which took place, at the same time it created a massive dependency on external funding support. The current reality is that much of the community sector has become so reliant on such funding that its eventual withdrawal is going to have a major and adverse impact on current and future community efforts, with unpredictable consequences.

Increasingly, activists from other conflict areas around the world have begun to visit Northern Ireland to both learn from local experiences and to share their own. Many important links have been established with international organisations.

Ainsworth Community Association

The story of **Ainsworth Community Association** encapsulates the emergence and consolidation of grassroots community work in the wake of the 'Troubles'. In the face of the traumatic events many organs of government proved incapable of responding adequately to the needs of local communities and it was left to ordinary citizens in the areas most affected to develop their own responses and strategies.

At the very beginning of the Troubles most local energies were put into vigilante groups: people erected barricades at the end of their streets as a form of defence against the 'other' community. These barricades were manned nightly until the early hours of the morning. Many of the vigilantes progressed into the ranks of the emerging paramilitary organisations. Others, however, realised that the survival of their communities needed something far more constructive.

However, just as State agencies had failed in their initial response to the Troubles, few in government or the professions seemed to know how to deal with the complexity of problems which were now emerging. In the absence of any real creative thinking emanating from these quarters it was left to the communities themselves to come up with solutions. In the Ainsworth area, as Louis West, one of the vigilantes, recalled:

> Myself, Ralf Hazel, Jack Harris, Tommy Aiken, Robbie Grub and a few others started meeting in Jackie Hewitt's house, trying to come up with ideas. We decided that we would try and open a community centre. But how to raise funds for that? We decided that we could do a collection and put a leaflet round the doors, for ten weeks, and everybody was allocated an area to do this collection.

And in their urgency to put constructive things in place in their community, they began to realise that to get things moving it was no longer any use writing a begging letter to someone in authority and pleading, "Can we do such and such?" No, it was a case of ringing someone up and saying, "Look, our community needs such and such, and we *intend* to do... whatever." As Jackie Hewitt recalled:

> I remember that certain officials were dragging their feet with regard to our desire to develop our community centre on Ainsworth Avenue. And we desperately felt we needed a community centre; we thought that it was absolutely essential to everything that we were hoping to do. So we threatened to get a portacabin and stick it in the middle of Ceylon Street – and suddenly things started to move, people started talking seriously to us.

In those days, of course, the work that was done at a grassroots level was oblivious of concepts such as 'capacity building', or even 'community development'. In the early 1970s community groups were focused on what was happening at the bottom of their own streets. However, the workers at Ainsworth saw the almost nightly

interface confrontations, mostly involving young people, not necessarily as a product of the sectarian conflict but as an outlet for the boredom and alienation felt by those young people. The workers felt that something had to be done about that; there needed to be somewhere for the young people to go, something to occupy them, to keep them off the streets. And so, Ainsworth Community Centre soon boasted a pre-school playgroup, two snooker tables and a boxing club.

As well as working to improve the wellbeing of the local community, the centre also tried to provide entertainment to lift people's spirits, for in those days people couldn't really travel too far outside their own area for such things. Ainsworth brought some well-known entertainment into the Woodvale, including acts such as Roly Daniels, George Hamilton IV, and Frankie McBride and the Polka Dots.

As Ainsworth got more and more involved in local community issues, they soon began to liaise with other groups trying to tackle similar problems. More significantly, they began to meet people who were working on a 'cross-community' basis. Joe Camplisson, for example, was running a community development office on the Antrim Road, and he and the people associated with that office, such as Jim McCorry, began to have an influence on what Ainsworth was doing. As Hewitt remarked:

> We began to see a wider picture, and we began to associate with people from the 'other' community. And, really, that seemed a very natural thing to do – although you were always worried in case you would end up getting your windows broke because you were talking to Catholics. Even if all you were doing was getting pensioners together you could face difficulties, because at that time many people were hesitant to be seen working cross-community.

Hewitt also noted:

> By this time we were also getting away from the notion that to attain peace all you had to do was release a couple of doves into the air, shake hands with each other in church, and so on… that wasn't really what was going to resolve the problem. We needed to find jobs for our young people, we needed to work for real change in people's everyday lives. And in the process we gained more expertise in community development-type work. And these things were being brought about by our own community-based efforts – the politicians couldn't deliver this; and, anyway, their main concern was to marginalise us.

Area-based community endeavour had progressed to cross-community contacts; the next stage was cross-border engagement. As Hewitt recalled:

> In recent years people could easily get involved in cross-border work because it was readily funded under the Peace programme. But Ainsworth's first involvement in cross-border work came about because of quite different circumstances. There had been a bomb in Dublin, and obviously the people in Dublin felt a mixture of reactions, including a deep anger. But some busmen

> in Raheny, all trade unionists, met together and decided that their reaction would be to form a friendship group. Through their representative Mick Nelson we began this relationship with the Dublin busmen, linking in also with Glencree, and Father John Carroll in Strokestown, Roscommon. And we started to take kids back and forth on camping trips and things like that. And to us the real value in all this was that it didn't happen because money was there from a 'peace programme' to do it; it came about because people wanted it to happen and they went out and they got the money to make it happen.

Such exchanges were not without problems. One particularly traumatic experience [described more fully in Island Pamphlet No. 86] occurred when the father of two of the children was murdered by the IRA and the holiday had to be abandoned and the children brought home. As Hewitt recalled:

> That was a terrible experience. I mean, here's two kids from the Woodvale: we had taken them down South and their father is shot dead by the IRA. And what do you do now? Do you continue with cross-community work, with cross-border work? Those were the questions we faced. That was just one experience, but those were the situations that Louis West, Tommy Aiken and myself had to deal with and then decide what we were going to do about them.

While relationships with progressive individuals within the leadership of the Loyalist paramilitary organisations – people such as Andy Tyrie – were positive, some elements within the rank and file were not always so supportive. As Louis West recalled:

> There was constant harassment from some paramilitaries. They once robbed Ainsworth, took everything out of it – even the salt-sellers! The paramilitaries also wanted to use Ainsworth to make money. We kept them out to the extent that we told them if they were caught using the place we would probably lose our grant from the City Council. They wanted to use it every month for selling drink or having a cabaret, because their own club wasn't as big as ours. [But there were also more personal threats.] One night my place was petrol-bombed and I had to jump over the flames! I can't prove it, but I could nearly bet that it was local paramilitaries behind it. I wasn't the only one under pressure, of course. Jackie Hewitt had his windows put in one time.

Despite all these pressures, Ainsworth Community Centre eventually became an integral part of the local community. It was used as a distribution centre during the period when EEC stocks of meat, butter and cheese got too high and community organisations were allowed to distribute it cheaply. It was also used as a depot to which the local community could bring money, food and clothing to be sent to people in Eastern Europe, or the victims of the earthquake in Armenia. And during the period of the Ulster Workers' Council strike (1974) it was in operation 24 hours a day; local people even slept in the Centre because they had no heat in their homes.

The work done at Ainsworth was eventually complemented by the setting up of a Youth Training project, and, when the ACE (Action for Community Employment) scheme was brought in by government, the development of Farset Youth and Community Development Project. Farset was just one of many innovative community projects which can trace its roots to the energies first harnessed by Ainsworth Community Association.

Farset Youth & Community Development Project

Farset Youth & Community Development Project originated in 1982 under the management of community activist Jackie Hewitt. Funded under the auspices of the Youth Training Programme, it focused on the needs of young people in the Ainsworth area of Belfast's Shankill Road. As it grew, it moved to premises on the Springmartin Road, on the West Belfast Protestant/Catholic interface. There it found an ideal opportunity to display its imaginative way of responding to community needs. On derelict 'no-man's-land' between Protestant and Catholic estates, Farset created a **City Farm**, introducing an assortment of farm animals into the lives of local children, as well as training young people in horticultural and animal husbandry skills. Encouragingly, the City Farm, throughout the period of its existence, drew its visitors, its workers and its supporters from both sides of the communal 'divide'.

Farset then came under the auspices of the Action for Community Employment (ACE) scheme and its continued growth – it eventually employed some 250 people – necessitated another move. In 1985 a new site was identified on the Springfield Road, once again directly straddling the 'interface' between Protestant and Catholic working-class estates. In the 1970s this area had not only been deemed to be among the most socially disadvantaged in Europe, but had been described as Western Europe's "most dangerous conflict point". In reality, the new 'site' was a derelict building standing amid waste ground, and many were the words of caution and predictions of failure voiced. But for Farset's management and staff, such a location seemed quite appropriate. If Farset's purpose was to enhance the quality of life for local communities, to increase job opportunities for young people, and to make a contribution to confronting the sectarian divide . . . then what better place to be?

The energies nurtured by Farset led to the initiation of numerous projects, with one project often leading directly to another. For example, during Farset's **Youth Exchange Scheme** with France, a group of young people from Belfast and Dublin displayed a great interest while visiting the graves of the many Ulstermen and Irishmen who had died at the Battle of the Somme. Out of this interest grew the **Farset Somme Project**, which did much to counter prevailing misconceptions by revealing that the sacrifice made during the Great War was a *shared* one, involving

Protestant and Catholic alike. Teams from Farset undertook the renovation of Ulster's war memorial at the Somme – the Ulster Tower – erected in 1921, but lying locked up and disused. Other employees compiled an extensive **computer database** of all Irish casualties in the War, and a **Visitor's Interpretative Centre** was constructed adjoining the Tower.

The Somme Project also enabled Farset to fulfil one of its founding ambitions: to initiate projects which could become self-sustaining. Out of the Somme Project grew the **Somme Association** which now employs over 40 people, and is behind the acclaimed **Somme Heritage Centre** at Conlig in County Down.

The skills of those involved with Farset's **Mural Department** also became much in demand at community centres, hospitals, leisure centres and other venues throughout Belfast. The mural team was part of Farset's **Community Arts Department** which also provided creative art and photographic services of the highest standard.

Many community organisations, unable to afford to have a video made of their work – whether to promote their objectives or for fund-raising purposes – were greatly assisted by Farset's **Audio-Visual Department**, which made over 80 such videos.

Such innovative projects not only helped to improve the quality of life for local communities, but enhanced the self-esteem and employability of the ACE workers, many of whom left Farset with certificates of competence and often examples of their work. These were vital commodities as they continued the search for employment.

Farset's **Training Department** constantly monitored the ACE workers' progress. Each employee was assessed and a 'training needs analysis' prepared, geared to helping them develop existing skills and acquire new ones. Training was provided 'in-house' and Farset became an accredited RSA centre, offering CLAIT, DTP, IBTZ, and other courses such as NEBSM, Audio-Visual and Media Techniques.

Farset's **Environmental Team** greatly enhanced local communities, paying particular attention to the needs of the elderly and infirm. Environmental squads engaged in building and joinery, painting and decorating, gardening, graffiti removal, as well as general labouring. While the Environmental Team attended to the material needs of vulnerable groups in the population, their social and personal needs were not neglected, with **Community Care** in the form of home visitations being offered.

Farset's **Computer Department** was involved in transferring to computer 380,000 burial certificates from Belfast City Cemetery, creating a database which is proving to be of invaluable assistance to the Irish genealogy industry. In the process, the ACE workers also received accredited computer training.

The **Research Department**, which involved archive research and the gathering of oral history, underpinned Farset's belief that a proper understanding of the past could make an important contribution to the future.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR, an ambitious **East European Aid** project brought much-needed help to areas of Eastern Europe where civil conflict had drastically affected people's lives.

One of Farset's most successful initiatives has been **Farset Enterprise Park**, set up in 1989 to assist former employees and local people start their own businesses. The proprietors are drawn from all traditions; indeed, some businesses are partnerships of people from both Nationalist and Unionist backgrounds.

When Farset first set up in its Springfield Road site, the surrounding area was an economic 'black-spot'. Not only did Farset become the landmark project of the area but new developments also took place all around: Farset Enterprise Park; Springvale Business Park; and now **Farset International Hotel**. Without question, Farset has been the foremost pioneer in the regeneration of the area.

When government finally ended the ACE programme, Farset's workforce was decimated and ultimately reduced to its current core staff, with a primary focus now on Farset International Hotel and on building exchanges between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (through the **Farset/Inishowen & Border Counties Initiative**). Farset also continues to support a number of reconciliation and conflict resolution initiatives, such as the remarkable work of local community activist **Joe Camplisson**, and the **Farset Community Think Tanks Project**.

Through the voluntary input of its Board of Directors Farset has been fortunate in having a wide and impressive range of skills placed at its disposal. Directors, management, staff and workers together ensure that Farset will never stand still; it will be constantly engaged in developing purposeful and innovative ways of meeting community needs.

Farset International Hotel

The idea for a purpose-built hostel was first mooted in the 1980s during exchange visits organised by Farset Youth & Community Development Project, between young people from Belfast and their peers from other European cities. Mainly as a result of the political unrest, youth accommodation in Belfast left much to be desired, and contrasted sharply with the excellent accommodation on offer to the young people from Belfast on their European visits. As Belfast began its slow return to peace and normality in the 1990s, the idea of establishing a hostel was resurrected and driven by Farset's manager, Jackie Hewitt. He was supported throughout the process by Farset's chairman, Rev Roy Magee, and president, Barney McCaughey.

They identified the potential upturn in the depressed Northern Ireland tourism industry and the need for quality conferencing, banqueting and overnight

accommodation at affordable prices. It was also recognised that after many years of the 'Troubles', West Belfast's reputation had created a curiosity factor for large numbers of potential visitors who would be interested in cultural tours to see the famous Belfast murals and learn about the Northern Ireland conflict. After identifying a suitable site Jackie and his Farset directors began to explore the feasibility of building a hostel using local labour.

The initial plan was to build the facility through a government-sponsored work/training programme. However, this scheme was abandoned as a result of a change in government policy, before any construction had commenced. Added to this, potential funders, including the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and government departments, were not convinced of the need or the potential success of a hostel facility located in the upper Springfield Road, an interface area of Belfast which had borne the brunt of decades of political upheaval and inter-communal conflict.

Undeterred, the organisers pushed forward with their plans for the hostel project, in the hope that it would bring jobs and revitalisation to an area which had become synonymous with violence and division. This self-assurance had been forged from their experience of initiating numerous social and economic regeneration projects during the worst periods of civil unrest.

The hostel project received a real boost and encouragement when the International Fund for Ireland agreed to commit substantial funds to the venture, subject to approval and support by government in the form of an economic appraisal. But this appraisal process dragged on for many months with a huge amount of work put in by Farset directors, most of it on a voluntary basis. Eventually, it became clear that the group's endeavours were being frustrated as they found themselves pushed 'from pillar to post' and burdened with the sheer weight of bureaucracy involved in the process. Indeed, the organisers felt that some government officials were actually opposed to their plans for a flagship social economy project, as they were being forced through so many hoops. To add insult to injury, the local further and higher education institution pulled out of its commitment to the project at the last minute. They had indicated an interest in becoming an integral part of the initiative, training unemployed people for the growing catering industry.

These negative developments left board members reeling and gave ammunition to the cynics. Eventually, the patience of Farset directors ran out and a letter was sent to funders and supporters informing them that all plans had been shelved. This caused shock-waves within the public and political sectors and two local politicians met with the disillusioned Farset board and encouraged them to persevere. A meeting was convened attended by various government officials and a deal was hammered out which gave the green light to fund the project.

After many years of frustration **Farset International** finally opened its doors for business in 2003. The project costs of £2.25 million were met by a cocktail of

funding from IFI, the Department of Social Department, Belfast European Partnership Board, as well as a loan from Ulster Community Investment Trust. To date Farset International, which has become more of a budget hotel than a hostel, has been a major success, defying the critics and cynics as its reputation as a quality location continues to grow. The average occupancy rate since the official opening has exceeded 60%, which is a remarkable achievement considering the venture had been established in untried territory.

Patrons come from across the island of Ireland and international visitors have been flocking to the venue which offers *en suite* twin rooms with TV and tea and coffee-making facilities. There is also a residents' lounge, a self-catering kitchen, laundry and secure parking. A restaurant and bistro not only serves food for guests but caters for large and small on-site conferences. At one such conference in 2005, US Senator George Mitchell paid tribute to the excellent facility and the role it plays in cross-community and cross-border events. Indeed, the hosting of local and international peace-building programmes has been an important aspect in the growth of the facility as a neutral and safe venue.

Springhill Community House

Just across the 'interface' from the community workers in Ainsworth and Farset, their counterparts within the Catholic working-class communities had been just as active in creating grassroots-based projects. One of the most innovative was **Springhill Community House**, the house itself being the residence of radical priest Fr Desmond Wilson. Fr Wilson had spent 15 years teaching young people in St Malachy's College, but felt that much of that education would be wasted, because the young people, once they left school, would ditch most of it. He felt that what was needed was a programme of c*ontinuing education right throughout life*, which would help people to develop.

He was not alone in such views, for a belief in community-based education gained ground in the 1960s. This movement also coincided with the advent of the Troubles, when the normal institutions of society had been found wanting, and many believed there was an urgent need to analyse that failure and develop more adequate alternatives.

A group of people around Fr Wilson decided that one thing they could do was to provide people with an empty space in which they could determine their own programmes of education. And so, at the beginning of the 1970s, they

experimented by having a house in the Springhill area of Ballymurphy open to the public, with nothing on offer except an empty room. Yet that empty room soon became a place where people came and discussed what *they* wanted to learn.

When community groups began to emerge in greater numbers throughout the 1970s, local people began to take a direct interest in different aspects of their lives – politics, planning, policing, etc. Their efforts were often met by hostility from those in the professions; the people who were in charge of such things were resentful that 'ordinary' people should be demanding an input. It was no different with education-based initiatives such as Springhill. Those who controlled education – whether in the educational establishment or within the Catholic Church – were resentful of people in Ballymurphy taking control of their own education. Likewise, the people who were in charge of resources withheld funding from the initiative and they had to survive on support from a few understanding and open-minded individuals.

Despite these obstacles the project continued to develop. University lecturers were invited to come in, on an unpaid basis, and hold classes and discussion groups. There was a similar engagement with people from the Arts Council. Representatives from all the political parties were invited to come and argue their case. As Fr Wilson recalls:

> One of the first things that people did was to invite every political party to come and talk to them, and every one of the parties said 'yes'. The DUP had reservations about coming into Ballymurphy, but they readily agreed to meet us elsewhere – I think it was in the Ulster People's College. Interestingly, however, the people who most consistently refused to come were from our own Church. Even for just ordinary discussions. That was a terribly demoralising thing for people.

A few public enquires were held, and, eventually, formal classes in 'O' and 'A' levels, because some people wanted those. But what seemed to be most important was the *informal* approach to education, by which people decided what *they* wanted to talk about and *who* they wanted to hear. The everyday concerns of people were also catered for, and people came into Springhill Community House and held creative discussions around those concerns, trying to determine possible remedies for them.

When Springhill Community House started up, its focus had been on adults, not on young people. But one day a couple of parents came along to say that their children had been expelled from school. At that time it was very easy to expel children; there seemed to be a particular desire on the part of certain schools to focus on 'academic achievers', and if any of the pupils coming from the 'lower orders' showed behaviour which didn't fit in, then they were expelled. Anyway, these youngsters came with their parents, and asked for help. Other than assisting the parents to obtain legal advice, there was little Springhill could offer to these

young people – apart from that empty space. But the young people wanted to avail themselves of that, and when their numbers grew, Springhill finally advertised for a teacher – but explained that there was no money to pay them! The project was very fortunate to obtain the services of an American, Pat Daly, and soon a vibrant alternative education facility developed.

Springhill provided the space – just a couple of rooms in the house – and the books and the light and the heat, and Pat Daly supplied the teaching. It was basic English and Mathematics, but also whatever the pupils showed any interest in wanting to learn. Daly had the idea that if they wanted to learn something that he didn't know anything about, well then, they learned it together – which proved to be a sound educational approach. After Pat Daly's departure Springhill Community House was very fortunate in having a succession of excellent individuals who acted as tutors.

There were those in the education system who very much resented what Springhill was doing. One of the teachers in St Mary's College referred to projects such as theirs as the 'dubious alternatives', a term which, in turn, the project now began to use with some pride. Also, schools resented the publicity which was being focused on the ease with which children could be expelled. There was also the fear that if people took charge of their own education there would be chaos; as Fr Wilson commented: "People in the professions are always afraid of chaos." The education establishment tried to freeze the project out. They even tried to claim that what Springhill was doing was against the law. But the freezing out didn't succeed, and, in Fr Wilson's opinion, the initiative was a successful one:

> I think the whole experience of Springhill was a positive one. For example, there was one girl in particular who had been very difficult and really disrupted things. But she eventually turned into a completely different person, and came back and helped us in the House. In fact, the number of young ones who came back, either as visitors or to actually help us, is a fair indication, I think, of their positive experience. We saw youngsters coming in here and they would sit with their heads down, yet after a short period those youngsters would be standing up straight and looking as if they really had a new sense of self-confidence.

Many of the individuals behind Springhill Community House were also instrumental in the development of **Conway Mill Education Project** on the Falls Road, which took the concept of community-driven education to a much higher level. It fared even worse from those in the establishment; indeed, there was a strenuous campaign mounted against it. From the TV programme *The Cook Report* to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, numerous efforts to destroy Conway Mill as a community-driven initiative were made. As Fr Wilson noted:

> Basically they were afraid of people taking control. Even if Springhill Community House and Conway Mill Education Project had been extremely conservative there would still, I believe, have been that resentment because the 'wrong people' were in control.

The efforts to freeze-out the two initiatives prevented them from receiving government money to develop their work, and they relied to a great extent on the likes of the Rowntree Trust, or on donations from sympathisers around the world who believed that the work which was being done was necessary and purposeful.

But, ultimately, as Fr Wilson points out, the two projects were all about creating opportunities not only for learning, but for meaningful dialogue and debate:

> At that time, local communities were engaged in more creative conversation than they were ever given credit for. We discussed a variety of options: from Ulster Independence to a United Ireland. There was a range of conversations going on, at a time when we were being told by government propaganda that 'these people are unable to talk to each other and we must go in there to keep them apart and do the talking for them.' Rubbish! Community groups were communicating with each other practically all the time.
>
> The fact of the matter was that if we wanted to talk to UDA people we rang them up on the phone and arranged something. Springhill and Conway Mill always provided an open invitation for people of all backgrounds to come and talk. The government wasn't providing that type of meeting space, but community groups were. Government was afraid of such talking, and that is why there was such a concerted campaign by certain people to outlaw Conway Mill, and to make sure such dangerous dialogue didn't occur.
>
> Sheila Chillingworth, from the Education & Library Board, told me that people down there were once talking about the kind of experiments taking place in education, such as in Springhill and Conway Mill. And a lot of it was indeed experimental: people would say – we'll try something and see if it works. Anyway, at this particular meeting the idea of people coming into a house in a council estate and holding their seminars there really bugged them. "But how do they pay for all this?" someone asked. (Actually, a lot of the tutors gave their services free.) Someone said, "Apparently, they put round a hat." And there was a roar of laughter. But, as Sheila Chillingworth pointed out to them, "You may laugh, but it works."

Springfield Inter-Community Development Project

In 1988 the committee of Ainsworth Community Centre began to re-evaluate the effectiveness of the cross-community work it had been engaged in for almost twenty years. That work had largely consisted of taking young people and adults out of the area, where they were provided with the opportunity to meet with others from across the 'peaceline'. However, despite a genuine commitment to

the work, the benefits were hard to quantify. While it was obvious that cross-community friendships were being made, it was also only too obvious that the peaceline was growing longer and larger and tensions between the communities were increasing rather than being ameliorated.

Concern at these increasing tensions along the 'interface' between the two communities was further compounded by the growing unemployment within the broader Protestant working-class community which Ainsworth serviced. Alongside this, the area was suffering the effects of housing blight brought on by redevelopment. There was clearly a need for a radically new approach which would address the *totality* of problems facing the community.

The committee was also well aware that the community on the other side of the peaceline was also experiencing the same problems. Accordingly, Community Development was adopted as a strategy, aimed at taking both communities towards social and economic reconstruction and the resolution of violent conflict.

Simultaneously, other people working in the community on various projects had also recognised the need for a new approach, and their ideas were shared and discussed with those involved in the Ainsworth initiative. As these discussions proceeded it was agreed to apply for funding to allow for the implementation of a broad community development approach, with the aim of complementing the work done by existing community groups in both communities.

When Billy Hutchinson – who had been working in the Shankill Activity Centre on behalf of Farset – suggested the establishment of a Standing Conference, bringing together community groups working on both sides of the interface, it was decided to make this concept the pivotal component of the new initiative.

With the support of Joe Camplisson, who also provided consultancy and training, an application was made to the International Fund for Ireland in 1988 and resources were secured in Spring 1990 to employ a project director to:

1. Co-ordinate the inter-communal activity currently undertaken by Ainsworth Community Association in partnership with other community groups.
2. Devise and direct a programme which helped implement the new Community Development strategy.
3. Research the totality of problems which affected the quality of life for all sections of the community.
4. Make recommendations with respect to those research findings.

The post was duly advertised, and Billy Hutchinson, because of his obvious enthusiasm for the task, was appointed in July 1990. The initiative was to be called the **Springfield Inter-Community Development Project** (SICDP). It should be pointed out that when Billy, a Loyalist ex-prisoner, embarked upon his initial discussions with groups on both sides of the Interface, the violence was continuing unabated and to move between the two communities carried its own risks. His

efforts were later shared by Tommy Gorman, an IRA ex-prisoner, and both of them set about their task with a clear commitment.

However, underpinning the whole effort was the deeply-felt belief by everyone concerned that the two communities could work together for the betterment of all. It was believed that if the process succeeded in developing it contained more potential to improve the quality of life for both working-class communities along the Shankill/Falls/Springfield Road interface than anything undertaken by the political parties and government agencies.

The first Standing Conference, involving 80 community activists from both sides of the Shankill/Falls/Springfield Road interface, was held in October 1992 and, despite the tensions which surfaced, proved to be a landmark event. In collaboration with Michael Hall of Island Publications a booklet describing the conference was distributed around the community network. A reviewer in *Books Ireland* commented:

> There is no attempt [in this publication] to disguise the disturbing aspects of the conference or the eruption of emotive issues, which reminds the reader this was not just an academic debate but was concerned with real issues which affected and divided two communities of real people.

This collaboration with Island Publications also saw the setting up of '**Think Tanks**', which brought community activists and others into small-group discussions which were in turn summarised in pamphlet form and widely disseminated. At first these Think Tanks were 'single-identity' in composition, but eventually, as SICDP had hoped, joint Think Tanks were eventually convened.

While the convening of an annual Standing Conference had to be put on hold, partly due to the ongoing political situation, SICDP forged ahead as one of the most dynamic and innovative community-based organisations working on the West Belfast interface. Its remit constantly broadened to include work on the problems faced by diverse groups of people, including young people, women and ex-prisoners. Inter-community cultural initiatives were undertaken and, of course, the prevailing socio-economic conditions confronting working-class communities along the interface became a prime focus of their energies. SICDP initiated the first **Belfast Community Economic Conference**, in an effort to draw attention to, and seek remedies for, socio-economic needs.

A **Community Leadership** programme was established, which provided training for local community groups and community activists. This effort to create a pool of local expertise in interface community development work was to become a mainstay of SICDP's work.

This brief overview cannot do justice to the work undertaken by SICDP in the course of its twenty years of community engagement. Needless to say, however, the project has maintained its influential position within grassroots community development work.

SICDP, under the leadership of Roisin McGlone, was renamed **Inter-Action Belfast** in 2002 as an acknowledgement that its work and influence was impacting far beyond its local setting. The 2008–11 strategic plan stated as its aims:

- Promoting participation in reconciliation, communication, information and empowerment
- Building trust and exploring diversity
- Developing communities across the interface and highlighting community needs
- Community safety and the resolution of contentious issues
- Sustainability of Inter-Action Belfast

Within this remit, Inter-Action Belfast acts as not only an 'umbrella agency', providing assistance and acting as a funding conduit to over 40 local community organisations, but also runs a number of specific projects including:

A **Cross-Border Women's Project** which brings together mainly women on a cross-border and cross-community basis. They work on pertinent issues through a training course entitled 'Paving the way to reconciliation'. This draws on their personal experience to develop and enhance their life skills. The second stage of the course is at present training women in community leadership and activism.

A **Peace and Reconciliation Development Project** which aims to develop a shared vision for interface regeneration. It employs two workers from nationalist and unionist backgrounds who together manage a **Mobile Phone Network** and the **Springfield Inter-community Forum**. The network was originally set up to co-ordinate a controlled response to inter-communal rioting through grassroots knowledge and communication. The Forum began life as cautious and tense meetings between the activists involved, but through the building of strong interpersonal relationships has expanded to become instrumental in facilitating dialogue which is recent years has seen a dramatic reduction in community tensions. It has now moved on to tackling social problems and local regeneration issues on a cross-community basis.

More recently the project undertook a task which initially was fraught with great risk to the organisation but proved to have been farsighted. It grew out of the deadlock over parading which had resulted in the worst interface rioting seen in years. Dialogue was at a standstill due to the refusal of the community to engage with the police and the lack of understanding between police and the community. Along with initiating communication to resolve conflict between the local protagonists, Inter-Action Belfast opened a channel of communication to the PSNI in West Belfast which eventually involved senior commanders in developing a new approach to community policing.

Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project

Before the Troubles, Suffolk, although a mixed area, was largely Protestant, separated from the rest of Belfast by numerous Catholic housing estates. The area then defined as Suffolk spread out north and south of the Stewartstown Road, with most Protestants residing on the southern side (the area to which the term Suffolk has since been restricted), but a fair proportion residing on the northern side (now referred to as Lenadoon), where they lived side by side with their Catholic neighbours. The actual setting, at the very edge of Belfast, was hard to better, for it was surrounded by green fields, with a sense of freedom and space not possible in public-sector housing closer to the city centre.

1969 saw the advent of the 'Troubles' and escalating inter-communal violence in different parts of Northern Ireland, which ranged from stone-throwing at houses belonging to the 'other' community, to the expulsion of families from certain areas of inner-city Belfast. And then in the 1970s the violence progressed to bombings and shootings, and tit-for-tat murders kept communities in a state of constant fear. Inter-communal tensions produced inter-communal violence and gradually, from fear or direct intimidation, the Protestants living on the northern side of the Stewartstown Road moved to the southern side, their former houses now taken over by Catholic families likewise escaping intimidation and expulsion from other parts of Belfast.

The Stewartstown Road eventually became established as yet another of Belfast's notorious sectarian 'interfaces'. On either side of this new interface residents tried to re-establish the basics of life. It was a difficult task, made worse by the ongoing violence and compounded by the fact that many people were living in houses damaged either as a result of the conflict or by former occupants bitter at being forced to vacate their homes. The Stewartstown Road reflected the division: it was desolate, derelict and unwelcoming.

Given the trauma of the Troubles it was understandable that cross-community contacts were slow to develop. Indeed, most people in both communities wanted nothing to do with the 'other' side. Nevertheless, some individuals in both communities realised that the communal divide was a real barrier to any hope of improving their areas. In the small Protestant enclave of Suffolk in particular residents were constantly leaving, their houses were lying empty and the estate was in terminal decline.

Some of the early cross-community contacts were kept secret, because such contacts carried great personal risk. However, one issue seemed to be sufficiently 'non-political' to allow people to unite: the lack of traffic lights on the Stewartstown Road. A joint campaign on this issue yielded an unexpected success and the preparedness to engage with the 'other' community increased, if only marginally. These productive cross-community efforts encouraged those who

believed that joint work could promote positive changes in the area, and more substantial ideas began to emerge. Talk was now of major regeneration, which would benefit both communities. But these tentative steps were still in their infancy when the area, like other parts of Northern Ireland, was engulfed in the continuing fall-out from the Drumcree conflict.

In July 1995, the police in the town of Portadown were involved in a stand-off with local Orangemen after the latter were prevented from marching from Drumcree church along the Garvaghy Road (formerly a 'traditional route' before demographic changes meant that the road now went past a Catholic housing estate). A compromise agreement with local residents eventually allowed the marchers through. The following year the Orangemen were again prohibited from marching and a more serious stand-off resulted. Three days of Loyalist rioting across Northern Ireland led the RUC to reverse their decision, and they forced the marchers through against the opposition of the residents. Days of rioting then ensued in Nationalist areas. In July 1997, the Orangemen were again escorted down the Garvaghy Road, after 300 Nationalist protesters had been forcibly removed, an action which sparked off severe rioting in many Catholic areas around Northern Ireland, including Lenadoon.

Indeed, the Suffolk-Lenadoon area suffered the worst violence it had ever experienced. Two hundred British Army soldiers were positioned along the Stewartstown Road interface and thousands came from Lenadoon and further afield to attack them. And although the Catholic community asserted that their targets were the soldiers, Suffolk estate was bombarded with hundreds of petrol bombs.

It looked like the end for any cross-community links. Yet, despite these events, and despite the risks involved, individuals on both sides agreed to keep trying. A mobile phone network was established in 1998 to cope with the now-annual Drumcree-related violence; this allowed each side to keep in touch and allay rumours emanating from the 'other' side, for it was often rumours which precipitated violence. And when this time the situation was handled successfully – unlike in other parts of Northern Ireland which saw extensive violence, including the murder of three children – it confirmed the benefits of joint work across the interface.

This joint work resulted in the formation of the Suffolk-Lenadoon Interface Group, a sign of growing confidence. But the impetus behind the group's most ambitious venture was provided when the Housing Executive decided that it was going to demolish a number of the buildings on the front of the Stewartstown Road. A radical initiative now began to take shape. A company would be formed: the **Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project**. Its management board would have four directors from Lenadoon Community Forum, four from Suffolk Community Forum, and four independent directors would be brought in because of their individual expertise. The Company's aim would be to build a two-storey block of shops and offices – replacing some of the derelict property then standing on the Stewartstown Road – the shops being on the ground floor, for which a commercial

rent would be charged. On the upper floor one wing of the building would provide office space for local community projects and initiatives (which would be charged a community rent), while the other wing would be available to statutory and other organisations able to pay the commercial rate. As long as the company didn't go bankrupt or get into debt, any profit would be divided into three parts. One third would be given to Lenadoon Community Forum – to fund projects or services within Lenadoon – another third would be given to Suffolk Community Forum – who would do likewise within Suffolk – while the final third would be retained by the Company to continue to develop its needs. Of course, this final shape did not materialise overnight, but was the product of months of intensive discussions.

Having agreed on what they were about, it was now time for the members of the Suffolk-Lenadoon Interface Group to sell the idea to their respective communities. This was a daunting task, but to their surprise, and to the credit of people in both communities, public meetings – despite being 'hot and heavy' and full of loudly-voiced misgivings – finally gave the workers the go-ahead to proceed.

Having obtained the endorsement of both communities, an entirely different challenge now lay ahead: the procurement of funding. It had been realised from the outset that if the project had been limited to only one side of the interface, then no funder would have shown much interest in it. However, the fact that this proposed enterprise was owned by both communities and would help to turn part of a violence prone, sectarian interface into a 'shared space' was surely something which would have appeal.

The search for backers began well. The International Fund for Ireland was prepared to put up half the money and the Housing Executive gave them the land. Approaches were now made to government – in the form of the Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO) – for the other half of the money. However, this proved more than problematic. As one worker commented: "The civil servants gave us constant hassle, putting us through endless hoops and obstacles. They openly called our initiative a 'white elephant' and questioned its viability." As the group members successfully responded to each obstacle, it was only to find that more obstacles were placed in their way. Finally BRO reluctantly came on board and funding for a first phase was agreed.

The initiative soon began to prove its worth and was able to assist community groups on both sides of the interface. The project then developed plans to move into a second phase, in which it was hoped to incorporate a 50-place child-care facility, two more shops and more office space. After some initial difficulties, funding was eventually secured to enable this second phase to proceed.

Atlantic Philanthropies provided funding for a joint peace-building plan. Today the initiative has gone from strength to strength and is lauded across Northern Ireland not only as an example of how two deeply-polarised communities can ultimately work together, but how local communities can take responsibility for the creative regeneration of their own areas.

The Early Years Project

In 1993, a number of community workers in the Shankill Road area of Belfast, Jackie Redpath, Jackie Hewitt and May Blood among them, sat down to develop a strategy which would try and project their vision for the Shankill 15 years into the future, not simply for the following 12 months, which had been the norm in community work planning given the ever-present uncertainty regarding funding, not to mention the ongoing political instability. The outcome was the 'Shankill Strategy Report', which would attempt to take forward the development of the Shankill through a number of key areas, including education.

Simultaneously, members of the Shankill Women's Forum had come to the conclusion that they needed to focus on the *earliest years* of a child's life. While it was certainly important to improve primary and secondary education provision, they felt that the very *stimulus to learn* could either be encouraged or hindered before children even reached nursery age. Furthermore, those workers involved in community development realised that it was pointless to attract inward investment into their communities if there was no local workforce equipped with the necessary skills. The problem was that within the Protestant community the value placed on educational attainment was extremely low. Yet without an education there could be no qualifications, hence no job prospects. It was a self-defeating cycle which was blocking any real chance of meaningful economic regeneration within the community.

And so 'early years intervention' gradually developed as a concept. By coincidence, Maureen Dunwoody, who worked for N&W Social Services Trust, was running a programme in the area around health issues, and part of this involved the training of local women who would visit people in their own homes to discuss family health matters. This approach – of training local workers to take a 'message' directly into the home – seemed an ideal method of delivering what the Shankill women now wanted to accomplish with their 'early years provision'.

They put a few tentative ideas together and engaged others in the discussion, one of whom had just returned from a visit to Europe where he had heard of the funding programme 'URBAN I', open to any European city with over 100,000 inhabitants and with pockets of deprivation. They decided to submit an application for an '**Early Years Project**', through which they would endeavour to work with all local children from the day they were born; indeed, they would offer the service to young parents even before their children were born.

The application was successful and the Early Years programme was established. Maureen Dunwoody became its first manager and May Blood

became Information Officer. Out of the £6.5m they received they planned to establish **three family centres**, employ 90 people, both Protestant and Catholic, and provide a sizeable training element for the workers themselves, and also the parents. To ensure that the jobs would be accessible to all local people they decided that the 'job descriptions' would not stipulate any skills – except for administration jobs where a certain amount of typing and computer knowledge was required. But for the 'Home Visiting', which was the vast bulk of the work, applicants only had to be a parent; that was the sole qualification required. They were, in fact, challenged by someone who said: "You're discriminating against me, because I'm not a parent, and yet I raised my brothers and sisters." So, they changed the advert to read: "...to be a parent or possess parenting skills."

The new workers were inducted 16 at a time, each batch receiving 10 weeks' intensive training: starting with the very basics, such as what they actually did when first setting foot inside someone's house, and including issues of confidentiality – for the workers, being local people themselves, were often known by those they were visiting, and this threw up a number of problems. But this was all worked through in the training and the ongoing support once they went out to do the actual work. Alongside the project's own training, the workers were permitted, and indeed encouraged, to undertake any other training which was deemed relevant. For instance, some people went to Queen's University, others took NVQs, at all levels, in various aspects of child-related work. Many of those who went through the project came out very well qualified and this helped them gain employment in a wide range of jobs.

The project, once it was fully operational, employed 90 workers, the bulk of whom were Home Visitors. A small flyer was produced, which was left in doctors' surgeries, the local library and other venues, explaining what the project was all about – and people then self-referred into the programme, requesting that a Home Visitor come and see them to discuss their needs. The Home Visitor might encounter a range of problems and it was their task to offer advice on these. Some problems, such as debt, might require that the worker refer the family to a consumer advice body. With other problems, such as mental health issues, the referral might be to an appropriate professional. But with everyday problems of living, such as coping with the children or just feeling isolated, the Home Visitor tried to encourage each family – usually the mother and child (or children) – to attend one of the three family centres, not only because meeting other parents could help counter the feeling of isolation, but because while they were there they would be exposed to the different education programmes being run, which dealt with everything from cooking to health issues. The Home Visitors were not educationalists, their task was simply to try and encourage an awareness of the importance of education, especially in the early years of a child's life.

There was a lot of research done on the initiative. For example, it was evaluated by Queen's University, who worked with the project for four years. Queen's ultimately came out with a very positive report, saying that it was the best use they had seen of such funding, and highlighting how positive the project's impact had been for the long-term regeneration of the local community.

Drogheda Cross-Border Focus

Sean Collins had grown up beside the River Boyne, little knowing the crucial part it would play in his efforts to facilitate reconciliation between communities north and south of the Irish border.

> Initially I couldn't fully comprehend the divisions which existed in Northern Ireland, for I had grown up in an environment where you didn't think about Catholics and Protestants: you played with your neighbour on the street and never wanted to know whether he was a Catholic or Protestant or Muslim or Jew. As the Troubles escalated, I became only too aware of the role history had played in both creating and sustaining those divisions – including the history of the Battle of the Boyne, 1690, which held such significance for the Unionist community of Northern Ireland. Then it was suggested to me that many Northern Protestants might want to visit the battle site, especially in the run up to the Tercentenary celebrations, and that there might be a role for someone local to talk to them about that period in their history. And so I began an intensive study of the history of the whole Boyne area, hoping that, if called upon to perform such a role, I could at least give a more balanced presentation than the one which then prevailed.
>
> I was indeed asked to perform such a role, and, starting around 1981, groups began to come down to Drogheda for a tour of the Boyne. Sadly, because of the conditions at the time – this was well ahead of the Good Friday Agreement – people were reluctant to say who they were and I regret that I don't have a record of those groups, because they simply wouldn't tell you. But I do remember having some wonderful lunches on the banks of the Boyne.
>
> And from then on there was a constant flow of groups coming down, and I was also asked to go to Northern Ireland and give a lecture or two on the Battle. Then in 2000 I was elected mayor of Drogheda and decided to use my office as much as I could to promote the whole notion of peace between all our peoples.
>
> One of my contacts in Northern Ireland was Bob Armstrong from Newtownabbey, who had brought members of his historical society

down. Bob knew Fraser Agnew, who in turn suggested I meet the board of the Farset project in Belfast. And so I met with Jackie Hewitt and others. They asked if I was prepared to work with them and provide communities with the opportunity to get to know each other better. I readily agreed, for that was something I had always believed in.

The chairman of one of the earliest groups which came down said that while it was marvellous to be on the Boyne, he felt regret that there were hundreds of people in his own town who would love to come to the Boyne but would be afraid. And I found it hard to take that people would be afraid to come to Drogheda. I was determined that there should be an open door, and Farset provided a vehicle through which people could come down, and when they came to the Boyne they knew that Ide [Lenihan] and myself would be there to welcome them.

It's a funny thing, the stereotypes that people have. Even now people will ask me what type of a town Drogheda was during the thirty years of the Troubles: was it pro-Provo, was it pro-Republican? I always tell them that it was a town like any other in the South, just trying to survive, and where no particular political party had any big following, least of all one connected to paramilitaries. But that was the image up North, and all the time we were trying to break down those stereotypes. And even today people in Drogheda regularly stop me in the street and ask, "Are you still meeting the people from the North?" And when I reply that we are they will say, "That's great. Please keep doing that; that's what is needed. People need to have their hands out in welcome for everyone who comes down here." And that's what we have tried to do.

Sean Collins then came into contact with East Belfast community worker, George Newell, who had a similar passion for history. George's belief that a balanced presentation of history could promote understanding led him to establish Ballymacarrett Arts & Cultural Society. As Collins noted:

In 2002, now calling ourselves **Drogheda Cross-Border Focus**, we decided to work in collaboration with George in East Belfast. The two organisations put in for funding for an extensive cross-border project which would use history as a tool for creating better understanding between our communities. We called the programme 'PATCH': Political Awareness Through Citizenship and History. It lasts for forty weeks, and the participants look at all aspects of their local history, and the history of the island. We believe that the PATCH programme has not only engendered a far better understanding of our history – as well as demolishing a lot of the myths and rubbish with which people's minds had been filled for far too long – but it has allowed genuine and lasting friendships to grow. And as long as the funding is there to support our work we will certainly continue to do it.

Another stalwart of Drogheda Cross-Border Focus is Ide Lenihan, who first got engaged in cross-border work when she lived in Galway.

> When the Troubles first erupted in Northern Ireland, the government of the Republic felt they needed to have a contingency plan to cope with the anticipated flood of refugees fleeing south. I was then in the Civil Defence, and we were tasked with putting this plan together. It was decided that we couldn't let people gather all along the border, so they were to be moved to Limerick, Galway, Cork, etc. Now, the expected flood of refugees didn't actually materialise; we just got one big crowd who we sent down to Galway. But, subsequently, we decided to set up the Green Cross, and in those days – I suppose because we didn't know any better – we only worked with the Catholic side, which was mostly in Ardoyne.
>
> Then I came to live in Drogheda and met Sean and began to assist in the work he was doing. When I first got involved with the Northern Protestant groups who were visiting the Boyne two things struck me. Firstly, women in particular always wanted to fill plastic bottles with Boyne water to bring home, and my initial thought was: 'Mother of God, that dirty river, you wouldn't want to do that!' And then I said to myself: hold on a minute, I go to Lourdes as a Catholic and do the same, so what's the difference? So you were rationalising everything. But the second thing was that I found their misperceptions of the people of the South to be absolutely extraordinary. It was so negative, and I put that down to the way their politicians had wound them up. But, again, I had to look at that too, for what we were told about the Northerners was also much of the same, and we believed it.
>
> History is always written by winners, never by the losers. And in Northern Ireland there was next to nothing taught about Irish history, and in the South our history stopped at 1916 – and we knew nothing beyond that. I visited the Somme recently with a group and there was one man there – a former leading Loyalist – and he was very angry about how he had been duped over the years, and was only now finding out the real facts for himself, especially about the people in the South. This type of new understanding can only come from communities engaging with one another, and that is why this work is so essential.
>
> I am hopeful that there has been enough work done that you won't cod the people again, on either side. At the end of the day we all have similar problems, especially with regard to our families given the new downturn in the economy. I reckon we have come a long way since I first started in cross-border work: we can now talk to each other, we can respect each other's positions. That can only be done by communities, it will not be done by government, or legislation. We have broken those barriers.

Sean Collins noted that cross-border contacts could be made at many different levels:

We have focused on encouraging Northern groups to become involved with Southern ones, on different aspects, in any area we could. For example, we hosted a dinner one night for Drogheda and Linfield football supporters – we brought them together to talk and have a meal. We have done the same with bandsmen from North and South. We have built up some amazing links, whether through our association with Ballymacarrett or Farset.

In 2000 I also revived the cenotaph in Drogheda, which is the memorial to the men killed in the Great War. The ceremony hadn't been held for thirty years and I decided that I would revive it. To be honest, I didn't know what the ceremony was all about. There was no British Legion left in Drogheda, so I rang up a man I knew in the British Legion in Whiteabbey, John Dumigan, and asked him to explain to me what was involved. And he said he would come down and show me. And for that first commemoration he brought down 17 of his members, in their uniforms and their colours; and now about 100 of them come every year. We hold it on a Saturday so that they don't have to rush back to do their own one, and hundreds of local people come, as well as representatives of the different churches. We invited people whose relatives were named on the cenotaph to come – there were 400 names, and maybe 350 of their families are still living in Drogheda. Most of them turned out, and that was great to see. We also found that there are lots of people from Dublin and other parts of Ireland who had heard about our ceremony and had served in the British Army themselves, some of them alongside the ones from Northern Ireland, and they began to use the occasion to meet up again and renew old friendships. And that too has been great to see.

Ide Lenihan revealed just how extensive some of the contacts can be.

I work with a group from Derry who are involved with exploring the Ulster-Scots heritage. We visited the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, and Chesapeake Bay where many of the immigrants from the North of Ireland landed and settled. Now, we also run a programme in conjunction with people from Newtownabbey and when I mentioned the Ulster-Scots project to them they were eager to participate in that also. So we all went out to the Shenandoah Valley together – from Newtownabbey and Drogheda – and looked at the history of why people didn't stay in the North and what made them emigrate and so on. We learned an awful lot.

There is another project which Sean set up in Derry years ago – where we look at St Columbcille's legacy in Ireland and his journey to Iona in Scotland. We took a group up along the west of Scotland, and will be returning with another group very soon. And all those connections are being made all the time, with different people. If we get funding we will continue to explore this shared history.

Our funding is nil at present. We only get programme costs and core salaries whenever a programme is going on, but when it finishes we all go back to being voluntary workers. We are fortunate in that a group we helped at one stage have managed to obtain their own offices, and they let us have rent-free office space. It's a place where we can also hold meetings.

Sean Collins added one last anecdote which revealed how easily misperceptions arise and how, just as easily, they can be overturned.

One time an Orange lodge from Portadown rang me up and said that they wanted to visit the Boyne. The local police assumed that because they were from Portadown their visit would be seen as contentious locally, because of the Garvaghy Road stand-off and all that. And so, the place was surrounded by about 40 Gardai and plainclothes detectives. They set up roadblocks and closed off the area, meaning that people who lived in the area had to make long detours. And the Portadown ones came down, marched in their uniforms into a field at the Boyne, played a few tunes, went back to their buses and away they went. Now, there wasn't as much as a cross word said to them by anyone. So we went to see the police Superintendent afterwards and put it to him that the next time there was a group, if he did feel there was a need for security, would he not just put two fellas in a car a mile down the road out of the way. And he did that and there has never been any trouble.

We are determined to continue to keep these cross-border links going. As long as there is Farset and Ballymacarrett and Inishowen and ourselves there will be people to do it. Our problem, apart from not having regular funding, is that we cannot always facilitate the numbers of people who want to participate. There is a great eagerness there now for these links. And, more importantly, many ordinary people from North and South have now reached out to each other as friends, and some of them don't even need us to bring them together now – they have made their own contacts and go up and down to see one another independently – for weddings and such like, or just for the socialising. That proves to me that it has all been worth it and that it must continue.

Inishowen Partnership (youth and cross-border)

Inishowen Partnership, employing over 20 workers, has made a significant impact on local development in the Inishowen Peninsula, Co. Donegal, since it was established in 1996. Its work falls into three main categories: Services for the Unemployed and Training, Community Development and Education, and Youth and Education Initiatives. It is the latter aspect which which will be looked at here,

for the Youth Officer, P J Hallinan, has also widely engaged in cross-border work, something he was doing prior to joining the Partnership.

> I had been involved with people in the boxing world across the whole of Ireland, but particularly Northern Ireland. I represented Donegal on the Ulster Council of the Irish Boxing Association and was vice-president of the Council for 13 years. During this period I was in every part of Ulster, and visited Belfast regularly. In those years I was a member of the Garda Síochána and I suppose I was a legitimate target to both sides, but I can honestly say that I never felt threatened in any way. I saw a side to people, particularly in Northern Ireland, that others might not have had the opportunity to see. I saw them as good, honest people, who were committed and dedicated to the sport of boxing. And there was no divide there – politics or religion never entered into it; we always had a great respect for each other.
>
> During my time in the Guards I was Juvenile Liaison Officer, and my job was looking after young people who got into trouble with the law, trying to keep them out of courts and prisons and onto the straight and narrow, as well as get support services for them. In 1997 I retired from the Garda Síochána and I took up the post of Youth Development Officer with the Inishowen Partnership. Part of my job was to set up youth provision, training for youth leaders, and increase the opportunities for young people in Inishowen. I was in the job about two years when I became involved with an organisation called Border Horizons, which was responsible for the Wider Horizons programmes in the northwest, and that organisation was chaired up by Glen Barr, Paddy Doherty and Peter Dunne. Ultimately I became vice-chairman. But I got a phone call from Glennie one day telling me there was an organisation on the Shankill in Belfast called Farset, and that its manager, Jackie Hewitt, would like to meet with me, in relation to cross-border work.
>
> So I met up with the guys from Farset and quickly decided that we would see what we could do together. We got initial funding from Cooperation Ireland, for three years. Our role was to facilitate groups or organisations from both sides of the border meeting up with one another. The scheme took off and over the three-year period, thousands of people have engaged with each other through the programme.

Through his association with Glen Barr he then got involved with a remarkable project centred in Messines, Belgium. In 1998 former Loyalist politician Glen Barr and Southern TD Paddy Harte had launched the 'Island of Ireland Peace Park' there. Its purpose was to commemorate all those individuals from Ireland, from whatever tradition, who fought in the Great War. To complement the Peace Park and extend its purpose, an International School for Peace Studies was established in 2000 in collaboration with local people.

> Glennie had invited me to go out to Belgium to see the programme they had

going on out there, and that experience had a huge impact on me. As a consequence, we set up 'Foyle Training Towards Reconciliation' which was a programme based on World War I, and which engaged people from all backgrounds and traditions: Nationalists, Unionists, Catholics and Protestants. Basically the realities of World War I are used as a tool for reconciliation, for bringing people together, for looking at the sacrifice made by people from both traditions, those who enlisted in the 10th and 16th (Irish) Divisions and the 36th (Ulster) Division.

It's a five-day programme. As well as visiting the main battle sites in the Somme area – including the Ulster Tower at Thiepval and the Irish Cross at Guillemont – and the sites around Messines, the participants engage in numerous group activities. Basically: we walk, we talk, we socialise. The programme has reached out ever more widely and engaged with communities and community leaders and with young people. An amazing amount of people have been brought out to Belgium to undertake the programme.

I can safely say that the things which have happened during those programmes – the barriers which have been broken down, the relationships which have been developed, the understanding – have been remarkable. And we make it clear to the participants that we are not there to convert Catholics into Protestants, or Protestants into Catholics, or Nationalists into Unionists... The major focus is on education. I myself am still on a learning curve. We are not there to change people, we are there to give them an opportunity to explore and make up their own minds.

Basically, to quote the words of Willie McArthur when he was chairman of the International Fund for Ireland: "We don't have to love each other, we don't even have to like each other, but we certainly have to respect each other." And it is this mutual respect that is central to the whole thing, in a real and meaningful way – there is no tokenism involved.

A lot of young people – in mixed groups, North/South, Protestant/Catholic – have gone to Belgium and have had a great experience. It has provided them with an opportunity to meet one another, talk to one another and listen to each other. And many ex-combatants – both Loyalists and Republicans – have been with us and have played pivotal roles out there. They have engaged with the young people and have made a huge contribution to putting them right on a whole lot of stuff.

And I suppose one outcome of the experience is the acceptance that glorifying war and glorifying conflict is a futile exercise. In particular, the old mantra of needing to die for Ireland is fundamentally challenged. What we are trying to get the young people to see is that rather than dying for Ireland, it is better that they *live* for Ireland and make it a better place for everybody, North, South, East, West, Catholic, Protestant, Nationalist, Unionist.

The challenge now arose: how could the impact of this programme be brought home to Ireland itself? One way was through an initiative located at **Dunree Military Fort**, overlooking Lough Swilly, a few miles north of Buncrana.

> It was my personal experience in Belgium and France which was central to the setting up of the **Inishowen Friends of Messines**, the core task of which is to remember those men and women from all parts of Ireland, but particularly from Inishowen, who were killed in World War I and had been forgotten about. And for the last four years now we have brought people to Dunree Fort for an act of remembrance. And these people have come from East Belfast, the Shankill, the Waterside, the Bogside... you name it... from all over Ireland. Last year people from the Connaught Rangers Association came up from Co. Roscommon.
>
> Central to the commemoration is that we read out the names of all the men and women from Inishowen who we know lost their lives during the war – we have identified some 249 names – and we get someone from each of the respective parishes, preferably a family member, to read them out. And we have had a lot of encouragement over the years – and not one dissenting voice.

And there were other aspects of history which began to be explored.

> I was annoyed that I myself knew so little about my own history. So it is highly beneficial to focus on local history. We took two busloads onto the Shankill where they received a warm welcome. And when they were given a talk by some Loyalists everyone was surprised at how balanced the presentation was. Those Loyalists didn't apportion blame in any one direction, and to me that was very positive. We also took our group to the Falls Road. And to the Somme Heritage Centre – and they have done a great job there, it's very well delivered. We also took groups to the Boyne where Sean Collins gave them a fascinating talk. So there is a lot of local history under our noses which can be used as a learning tool as well.
>
> We went on a tour of Derry, its Walls and the Bogside, given by Sean Feenan at the Ebrington Centre. We did the AOH [Ancient Order of Hibernians], the Apprentice Boys... the lot. And the balance was there and the slants were looked at on both sides. It was a heavy day and would need to be revisited, but when you have balance you can let people make up their own minds. We did the American Folk Park, and it was amazing.

P J Hallinan is a firm believer in the value of cross-border engagement.

> Cross-border work has the potential to change this island for the better. I have long believed that the only people who will ever solve the problems of Northern Ireland are the people of Northern Ireland themselves, the 'ordinary' people. And it's about building a capacity and a confidence in

those people, so that they can come forward and go forward. And they need support in their efforts, they need resources, and regrettably with the ending of 'Peace II' those resources are diminishing.

And although I believe that things are now going in the right direction, there needs to be even more engagement and above all more dialogue. Dialogue is central to the whole process and good understanding will come from it. I think there has been a lot of dialogue taking place over the years and I have to applaud those people who put their necks on the line, irrespective of what side they come from, and have worked at it consistently and surmounted so many obstacles. Those people deserve to be given the chance to complete the job that needs to be done.

All the cross-community and cross-border engagement has succeeded in changing the whole atmosphere. I believe that the days of the dissidents are numbered. The people of Ireland have spoken, and they have made it very clear that they want a peaceful existence and they want natural, normal living for their communities and especially for their children. We do not have to endure what we had to endure for thirty years, and the challenge is to see what has been learned from the conflict, and whether enough people have learned not to repeat the mistakes of the past. And whether we now have the confidence to seriously address the divisive issues of the past and go forward. I have no doubt that we do.

In the process of dialogue and engagement there's a huge amount of common ground appearing: on the need for better education, better housing, better standards of living, employment... all those basic things. And I have seen people from both sides of the interface work together as best they can, even through difficult times.

I also believe that we have got to work at our culture and our history, and we have got to work at them for the right reasons. For if we do that, then they will be instrumental in helping us go forward. No more beating the old drum or shouting the slogans – that day has gone. The central thing to it all is trust, and the willingness to work together for a better future, and that is not impossible.

As a consequence of all these cross-border activities people from Northern Ireland, particularly those from the Protestant community who were once so suspicious of anything and everything across the border, are now beginning to appreciate that they have real friends in the Republic of Ireland. Similarly, people in the Republic have begun to realise that those people in Northern Ireland, who have been subject to conflict for so long, are really long-lost family of theirs. A few years ago, during the period when violence erupted on the Shankill Road, there were genuine concerns expressed here in Inishowen that wouldn't have been there before. People were coming to me and saying: "P J – are our people all right up there? Can we do anything for them. Sure they can come down here until it's over."

> Now, that would never have happened before; before they would have said: "Ack, it's that crowd up there at it again."

As this pamphlet goes to print the new 'power-sharing' Executive at Stormont hasn't met for some months as a result of the stalemate which has arisen between Sinn Féin and the DUP. The tragedy is that after all the hard work people at a grassroots level, north and south, put in to ensure that the 'peace process' was developed and sustained, the community sector is more under-resourced and sidelined than ever. On this, P J Hallinan made a final comment:

> The challenge for our different communities is to ensure that the politicians are doing their job, that they are looking after the needs of the people. There needs to be dialogue between the communities and the political parties, there needs to a forum where the politicians can be reminded not only of people's everyday needs, but of their hopes and fears. However, knowing what politicians are like, our communities must at the same time also develop the capacity to look after their *own* needs. People can exert more control over their everyday lives than they realise.

The conflict resolution efforts of Joe Camplisson

Joe Camplisson's involvement in community work had been thrust upon him when 'The Troubles' erupted in August 1969. Employed as a TV repair man at the time, and with three children at school, he was shocked and distressed by the unfolding events. Returning home from work one day, he found all entrances to his West Belfast housing estate obstructed by makeshift barricades and with an impromptu residents' group struggling to deal with a flood of refugees whose homes had been burnt out in the course of the vicious inter-communal conflict.

Joe's new path in life was initiated when a priest arrived at his door, accompanied by a tearful young girl. She had been in Dublin and returned to her home only to find it burnt to the ground and her family displaced. The priest assumed that, as Joe knew so many people in the area because of his TV repair work, he might know where her family had gone. He didn't, but he immediately assembled a group of local young people, gave them jotters and pencils, and got them to go round every house, not only to find out which household had taken in refugees, but what needs they had, such as bedding, etc. Within a short time the girl's parents were located, which gave a boost to these hesitant first efforts. Joe's van was emptied of its televisions and used to collect and deliver whatever people were willing to donate for the needs of the displaced.

Jackie Hewitt, manager of the Farset community project, was once asked

when he thought the 'peace process' started. Did it start with the 'Hume-Adams' talks? With Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern? "None of those," Jackie answered, "it started the moment the first stone was thrown." Jackie could easily have been talking about people like Joe Camplisson, for at that time Joe had one overriding thought: even when we do eventually get these barricades down, where do we go from there? The two communities seemed so polarised, so fearful of one another, that bringing them together seemed an impossible task.

Undaunted, Joe made his way over to the Protestant heartland of the Shankill and met with people behind the barricades there. He did so by first contacting local clergymen, such as Harold Good from the Methodist Church in Agnes Street. He asked these clergymen whether they would come into a discussion and bring along a few of the people manning the barricades, and they agreed to do so. He did the same on the Catholic side. The question then was finding a venue where both sides would feel comfortable. The Jewish community offered to play host in their synagogue on the Somerton Road. He also invited along representatives of the police and British Army. The meetings in the synagogue went exceedingly well and Joe quickly developed a good working relationship with people in the Protestant community, one which was to go from strength to strength.

This work brought Joe to the attention of Maurice Hayes, who had been asked to head up the new Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission [not to be confused with the later Community Relations *Council*] which had been set up by Harold Wilson's Labour government. Hayes discussed the idea of Joe working for the Commission, and he became their first fieldworker. Hayes had also brought in Hywel Griffiths, Emeritus Professor at Queen's University, whose task was to teach the team members community development theory and practice. The community development strategy established by Hayes and Griffiths was all-embracing, all-inclusive: no-one was to be excluded, including those at the extremes.

But how best to work purposefully with those at the extremes? Surely they were too far apart – not only politically, but with regard to their cultural aspirations – to be brought into a successful and productive relationship? Initially, Joe felt despondent at the enormity of such a task. But then Maurice Hayes also brought in John Wear Burton, from London University, to assist him in the work he was doing, and Burton's approach was to guide Joe's conflict resolution efforts throughout the years ahead.

Burton held that conflict resolution (as opposed to conflict management, conflict transformation or conflict reduction) requires a *process*, not of negotiation or compromise, but of *assisted self-analysis*, in which the parties to the conflict are brought to an understanding that what they are facing is a *shared problem*. Burton also believed that for a process of conflict resolution to have any realistic chance

of success, it had to involve the parties at the extremes, for only through them could you get sight of the depth of the conflict, and only through their direct engagement would it be possible to engender movement towards resolution.

Burton's approach struck an immediate chord with Camplisson in regard to the work he was engaged in. For although many seek to ascribe the 'cause' of the Northern Ireland conflict to different factors – class, poverty, criminality, terrorism, etc. – to him there was no doubt that at its core lay deeply-held, identity-related needs.

Nevertheless, it was with some reluctance that Joe began to work more closely with the paramilitary organisations, both republican and loyalist. However, once those in leadership of these organisations – such as Andy Tyrie, Chairman of the Ulster Defence Association – accepted that Joe's sole concern was with the wellbeing of *all* communities, a trust quickly developed. On the republican side Dáithí Ó Conaill was initially wary but agreed to nominate someone to represent the IRA in any dealings with the UDA.

Among other activities, Joe was involved in an important conflict resolution conference which took place outside Ireland, and which brought together individuals representing the main Republican and Loyalist organisations, along with some non-paramilitary community representatives, as well as politicians from the Republic of Ireland.

Perhaps an anecdote regarding that conference will give an insight into Joe's approach. One of the participants was Seamus Costello (founder of the IRSP and INLA, and later murdered in a Republican feud). At the conference Costello's blistering analysis easily demolished the arguments being made by the Irish politicians present and also the Loyalists. During a lunch-break Costello sat beside Joe.

"Well, Joe," he asked, "how do you think I did there?"

"Oh, you were at your most incisive best, Seamus," Joe replied.

Then he added: "You probably put things back five years."

Seamus looked dumbfounded. Joe continued:

"People in all communities are at different levels of political awareness and articulateness. You have to nurture them, provide them with opportunities in which they can develop and learn. Not put them off with such devastating arguments that they retreat into their shells. It has taken me a long time to get the Loyalists in particular to participate. I don't think that they will be in a hurry to engage for some time to come."

Suitably chastened, Costello was more diplomatic and accommodating for the rest of the conference.

But that was Joe. He knew that people could not be coerced into any agreement, they had to be brought into a situation where they could see – for themselves – that what they were *all* dealing with was a 'shared problem'.

Even today, decades later, some of the original participants still talk of the hopes that were engendered, and their lasting regret that the process couldn't have been sustained and developed further. However, the Community Relations Commission was wound up by the power-sharing Executive which was set up in 1974 as a product of the Sunningdale Agreement. The Executive clearly didn't see the importance of the work the Commission was doing on the ground.

Furthermore, Joe's approach was not always welcomed in some quarters. At a time when he was trying to prevent the expulsion of Catholics from the mid-Antrim area, a British Army major bluntly informed him that he did not approve of his efforts to keep areas 'mixed': "My men are getting shot at. It is a military imperative that I know who is doing the shooting. I need to have the Catholic and Protestant communities as far away from one another as possible. You are getting in my way."

And military antipathy to Joe's work did not end there. At great risk to himself – considering that Joe lived in the heart of a perceived Catholic/Republican area – a prominent UDA leader arrived at his house one evening to inform him that the UDA Brigade Staff had been informed that Joe was a leading Provisional! However, the UDA leader made it clear that the UDA knew that this was a deliberate set-up by some section within the security apparatus, and he wished to assure Joe that he was still viewed with trust and integrity, and, furthermore, he was encouraged to continue with his cross-community endeavours.

After the collapse of the 1974 power-sharing Executive, Joe felt that the British government regretted the absence of the Community Relations Commission, because Harold Wilson's office indirectly supported him in the establishment of the Northern Ireland Community Development Centre (NICDC). The full story of that initiative deserves to be told at some future stage, not least because of the wealth of individuals who came through its door and engaged in direct dialogue with one another: clergymen, paramilitary leaders, community workers, academics, local politicians and others. And this was at a time when violence was still ongoing.

When the NICDC eventually had to close through lack of funding Joe still remained active. For example, he undertook some conflict resolution work in the Russian Federation. But his deepest and longest involvement was when he was asked to assist in the conflict between the former Soviet republic of Moldova and its breakaway region of Transdniestria. He co-authored a detailed account of that initiative which subsequently caught the enthusiastic interest of two groups of Palestinians and Israelis who were endeavouring to engage with one another, and in 2003 they came to Belfast for a series of Joe's highly-motivating workshops, of which edited accounts were later published as Island Pamphlets Nos. 57 & 58. Indeed, the participants requested that 600 copies be sent to the Middle East to be distributed among their respective communities.

Farset Community Think Tanks Project

[**Note:** Leaders of the other initiatives described in this pamphlet insisted that I also include my own project. *Michael Hall*]

I have been involved in community activities since 1968, and had long felt that the rich diversity of ideas and opinions I was hearing daily at a grassroots level – much of it at variance with the stereotypical views presented by the media – needed to be heard more widely. I also believed that there was an urgent need for an acceptable vehicle through which people could be encouraged to engage in debate and dialogue. One means was by getting people from both sides of the so-called 'divide' into direct face-to-face small-group discussions. In March 1988 I endeavoured to gather together a small number of community activists (including radical priest Father Des Wilson as well as former UDA leader Andy Tyrie) into what I termed a 'Cross-Community Think Tank' but, unfortunately, the initiative never got off the ground.

I next decided I would try and stimulate debate through the medium of booklets, and in 1990 I began preparatory work on a series of history-themed publications which I planned to produce under the imprint of 'Island Pamphlets'. Then in 1992, in collaboration with Billy Hutchinson of SICDP, the Think Tank idea (which Billy had also been considering) was resurrected, and over the next few years we jointly facilitated a number of influential 'Think Tank' discussions.

In 1998 core funding was obtained under the EU Peace Programme and, with the administrative support of Farset, the volume of work took off. Between 1998 and 2005, operating as the **Farset Community Think Tanks Project**, I was able to facilitate a rich assortment of discussion groups, embracing young people, senior citizens, victims, ex-prisoners, community workers, Loyalists, Republicans, those with disabilities, women's groups, interface activists, cross-border workers... and many others. Think Tanks were convened in the Shankill, the Falls, Ardoyne, Glenbryn, Short Strand, Ballymacarrett and other parts of Belfast, as well as in Derry/Londonderry and Strabane. Initially people engaged in their own locally-based Think Tanks, but eventually community groups expressed the desire to cross the sectarian divide and engage in *joint* Think Tanks.

The EU funding allowed for 2000 copies of each pamphlet title to be distributed free to over 80 community groups and key individuals with whom I had built up working relationships during three decades of community activism. To date, there have been 90 titles in the pamphlet series, containing within them over one and a quarter million words of oral testimony, and over 175,000 pamphlets have been widely distributed around the community network.

[***2025 update**: As already noted on page 7 the number of titles has now reached 140, and over 202,500 copies have been distributed at a grassroots level.*]

‘Time stands still’

The forgotten story of prisoners’ families

compiled by

Michael Hall

ISLAND 95 PAMPHLETS

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cover photograph (of Crumlin Road gaol) © Michael Hall

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The group behind this initiative emerged from the 'Competent Helper' course run by ICPD (Institute for Counselling & Personal Development), under the stewardship of Prof. Chris Conliffe and John Foster

The facilitating group

(Issac Andrews, Gerry Foster, Tommy Hale, Fra Halligan and Gerald Solinas)

represented the following organisations:

Teach na Faílte (ex-INLA prisoner support group)
An Eochair (ex-OIRA prisoner support group)
Prisoners in Partnership (ex-UDA prisoner support group)

The facilitating group wish to thank the women who participated in the discussions which form the basis of this pamphlet for their willingness to share their recollections and their emotions so honestly and so openly.

The organisers wish to thank **Farset International** for their ongoing support

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Introduction

In 2009 Republican and Loyalist ex-combatants from three different prisoner-support organisations – *Teach na Faílte* (ex-INLA prisoners), *An Eochair* (ex-Official IRA prisoners) and *Prisoners in Partnership* (ex-UDA prisoners) – engaged in a series of frank and open discussions about their experiences of imprisonment during the course of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'. (See Island Pamphlet No. 92, *Preventing a return to conflict*.)

As well as endeavouring to extend the cross-community engagement which had long been developing as part of the 'peace process', a major purpose behind the discussions was to assist the ex-prisoners in their grassroots work with Protestant and Catholic working-class youth. In particular, they wished to respond proactively to the concern they had that many young people, unaware of the brutal realities of conflict and imprisonment, had romanticised the conflict and were voicing an increasing acceptance of violence as an outlet for their sense of alienation.

The ongoing work with young people has already achieved remarkable success, particularly in challenging – indeed, changing – attitudes and mindsets. 'Shared history' excursions to different venues around Ireland have given the young people a better appreciation of their commonalities, while visits to jails in Belfast and Dublin have provided a stark reminder of the harshness of incarceration.

In an effort to further consolidate this work – and also in response to a comment made by the wife of one ex-prisoner that "the story of the families is still to be told" – it was decided to engage a number of female family members in a separate series of discussions, focusing on the many difficulties they faced when a son, husband or brother was imprisoned as a result of the conflict. This pamphlet provides an edited account of those discussions.

Note: Each quote in this document is preceded by two capital letters. The first letter indicates whether the person speaking is a relative of a Loyalist prisoner **[L]** or a Republican **[R]**. The second denotes the speaker's relationship to the prisoner: mother **[M]**, wife **[W]**, sister **[S]** or daughter **[D]**.

Michael Hall *Farset Community Think Tanks Project*

‘Time stands still’

The impact of imprisonment

Although the Troubles engulfed whole communities, leading to more and more individuals becoming involved as combatants, on a personal level it was still a shock when a loved one was arrested and imprisoned.

[RW] My husband was arrested during the Falls Curfew and spent two years in Crumlin Road jail. I was left to rear my three kids on my own. I didn’t get any prisoners’ aid. I got £7 from social security. I put in for a [special needs] payment for warm clothing for the children but was turned down. I appealed it and got £3! I just kept going. Well, you had to, there was nothing else for it. I wasn’t the only one, there was hundreds of people in the same situation. He eventually got released, but was only out two weeks when he was lifted again and this time interned. I will never forget that day. It was Mother’s Day and he comes in and says, “I’ll go out and get a wee drink to celebrate.” I told him it wasn’t necessary but he insisted. He went out and didn’t come back! What happened was that he went to an off-licence, and bought two bottles of beer for me and two bottles of Guinness for himself. Now some incident had taken place and any men in the streets were being stopped and questioned by the Army. When the patrol radioed through his name and it came back that he was a Republican, they just took him away and interned him on the prison ship.† When I went to see him he could barely walk. But he never spoke about anything that was done to him. When I questioned him he would say, “Just forget about it.” After I came out from seeing him, the guy in charge of the ship sent for me. And I said, “Jesus, what’s next?” But the guy said, “It’s just to hand your husband’s property over to you.” My two bottles of beer and his two bottles of Guinness! I said to this man, “Do you know something? That’s what he was arrested for, because he went to get me and him a wee drink. He didn’t do any wrong, didn’t do anything.” And I had to sign for those four bottles.

[LW] When my husband first went into prison we had only been going together about three years. We didn’t have children together, although my husband has children from a previous relationship. His going to prison made a huge impact on my life. I was born and reared on the Shankill; my father was a worker all his days and none of my family were ever involved in anything political. So

† *HMS Maidstone* was used for a time as a holding centre for internees. It was moored in Belfast harbour, and in 1972 seven IRA members swam 300 yards through icy water in a successful escape.

whenever my husband was arrested, I sat wondering: how am I going to tell my family that he could end up in jail? Luckily they supported me, but it was traumatic having to tell my parents. Also, I had to build up some sort of relationship with his children, and try to keep them in touch with their daddy. Two of them were very young and it wasn't practicable to bring them on visits, but one was older so I would have taken her. And you try to hide your circumstances from people, apart from close friends. I worked in a Catholic area in a place where I was the only Protestant. I needed to change my working hours – so that I could go to the jail at 2 o'clock in the afternoon – so I had to explain the situation to my boss, and trust that he would keep it to himself. And I had to try and keep my circumstances a secret from my work colleagues. Yes, it certainly had an impact.

[RW] We weren't married at the time, just living together. One child. I was never politically aware; even now, I don't know much about politics, I'm not that interested to be honest. I knew he was involved in something when I first met him, but I never really asked any questions. Then when he got lifted I found out I was pregnant with our second child. That made things worse. The immediate impact was devastating. He got twelve years and done six. Every time you went up to see him you were searched. Some of the screws were alright, but some were really nasty. He was in Crumlin Road for a while and then he was moved to Long Kesh.† He was there at the time of the break-out, although because he was in the INLA he had to stay in his cell. When it was over the police came with dogs and they had to run, the dogs biting them and things like that. So you were worried sick about what might be happening to him.

[LW] I was only married three weeks and expecting whenever he went to jail. I couldn't afford to live on my own, so I went back to live with my mummy and daddy. It was difficult; I couldn't go to work because when he was on remand you had visits three times a week. And because I had so little money I had to rely on my family to help with parcels and things. But they supported me, and that's how I got through it. But it definitely made a big impact on my life. I was only eighteen, my husband only twenty. And people often only found out much later the impact it had on their children. For example, I never knew that when my daughter said to people "My daddy bought me this," some of them had replied, "Well, we haven't seen your daddy; you don't have a daddy!"

[RM] Soon after the Troubles really started the security forces came into this area and lifted a lot of men. They came into my house and took away two of my sons and my husband. They had them three days – took them to Hollywood

† There were four prisons where combatants were detained: Crumlin Road (Belfast), the Maze or Long Kesh (10 miles from Belfast), Maghaberry (20 miles), and Magilligan (70 miles).

Barracks. Now, one son was sixteen, the other seventeen. And they finally moved the younger one to Crumlin Road jail. And when I went up to see him in the jail his exact words to me were: "Did you bring me any cigarettes?" And I said, "Son, I didn't. I didn't know what to bring." Now, I will give the screw his due, but he came over to me and he says, "Here, I'll give him a couple of these, and I'll light one up for him." The screw also told me that my son was too young to be in there, they would have to let him go. And within twelve hours he was let out. They never even contacted us to tell us, though, they just threw him out onto the Crumlin Road. Now, God help him, but the Troubles were getting bad and he could have been murdered. I remember him saying to me, "Ma, it was terrible what they were doing to the fellas in there. Beating them and all, it was awful." It must have been terrible on him having to witness that. I remember my husband saying to me, "When they told me to do something I done it, because when I seen what they were doing to the ones who refused, I just done what I was told." The older boy wasn't released until later.

[LM] I can remember right from the start of the Troubles and my sons were just coming up to an age when they could have got involved in the paramilitaries. At that time I was a bit bitter myself about what was going on, but I never thought that anything would ever happen to any of mine. But one of them got a life sentence... and even to talk about it now makes me a bit tearful. I wasn't very well at the time and when I heard how long he was going to be in prison I couldn't accept it. I took a lot of tablets, I done a lot of things that I wouldn't normally have done because of what happened to him. I was heartbroken but at the same time in a way I was proud of him because he thought he was doing something for his country. And I think most of the boys then thought they were doing something for their country. But when I went up to see him in prison I had to tranquillise myself, because I couldn't accept where he was and the length of time that he was going to be away from me. To me, it was as if he had died. Even when I was putting out dinner plates for the other children I was putting a plate out for him too.

[RM] Then the Troubles got worse and worse, and my older boy kept getting lifted. Indeed, our house was always getting raided, the Army and RUC hardly ever stayed away from here. The oldest one in particular was tormented by them. He couldn't sleep in the house, he'd go to somebody else's house, then maybe another. God help him but he was tortured by them. Then finally he was taken away and put into Long Kesh, for three and a half years. But I still got raided. Some nights you didn't know whether to go to bed or not. There was always a fear there, a fear that they would come and take away my other sons. And, sure enough, one by one they were all lifted: eventually I had sons in the Crumlin Road, Long Kesh and Magilligan – at the same time!

[RW] Often you couldn't afford to buy parcels, you had to go and borrow money from someone, usually from his family. He got PDF [Prisoners Defence Fund] every Thursday, it was £7, but by the time Monday came you had the £7 spent, so you had to go and borrow again. We were able to keep our relationship going, there was always something there. Don't ask me what it was, but there was something there. Then when the kids got older it was getting more awkward. I tried to get a job but I couldn't get baby-sitters, so had to stay in the house. And the Troubles were still going on all around you. He missed all the wee family things: their first day at school, and things like that. And the kids were the same; they missed out on all those important occasions.

[RS] My brother was lifted on my seventeenth birthday and I will never forget it. He had been living out of the home and we hadn't seen him for a hell of a long while. Then he turned up one night – that was the norm. You wouldn't see him for a while, we didn't know what he was doing; I certainly didn't know. But he turned up that Monday night and the house was raided a few hours later and he was lifted, and was away then for the next eight years. Now, I was in sixth year in school and whenever he was charged and put in Crumlin Road prison my elderly father – he was in his seventies – said: "What are we going to do? Who's going to go up and see him?" And it just seemed the normal thing for me to say: "Well, I'm not going to go back to school. So, don't worry, dad, I'll be there to go up and see him." And that wasn't forced on me, it was just a natural instinct. I remember when I said that my daddy breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that I would be able to go up and visit him: he wouldn't be stuck if he needed anything, I would always be available to go up. My education was put on hold... permanently. Thirty years later I might ask myself: what if I had've gone back to school? I could even say that I *should* have gone back to school, finished my education. But I can't say that. That was the way things were. I was going to be there for my brother and I am happy that I was. I don't regret it, I don't say to myself: God, all those wasted years... for it just seemed the natural thing to do at the time. My brother was put in prison for eight years, and, by God, his family were going to be there for him.

[RW] It was harder for parents. My husband's mother – she's dead now, God bless her – but she went every day to the Crumlin Road court along with me, she never missed a day, she stood by him. You just had to cope. You never saw it as a burden. You had to do it, you wouldn't let them down, so you just done it.

[LM] My other children suffered a lot due to the way that I was getting on because he was in jail – I actually ended up in hospital a few times because of the stress I was under. They didn't tell me until years later; but they said they felt I had put them to one side and had just been thinking about him all the time.

[RS] I remember that night my brother was lifted. Everyone was in an awful state. He was taken to Musgrave Street police station and badly beaten. I was married with one kid and then it was a matter of organising visits. When he was on remand we went three times a week to visit him. It was really hard for my father, because after our mother died he had been left to rear three children – three, eight and eleven years of age. So he reared us. My whole life was him.

[RW] I thought it was very hard, because at that stage I had to bring up five boys, and having to take them with you everywhere you went. You were left with no money, you had to do it all yourself, there was nobody there to help you. My family understood him being inside, he was inside because of the supergrasses.† As one supergrass was pulling out of it there was another one to take his place – there were so many at that time. He was getting out of jail and then being lifted again. You were constantly up and down to the Crumlin Road jail, and in and out of court. From '83 until he finally got out in '86.

[RS] I was seventeen and my elderly father definitely didn't have much money. My sister was married, and her husband had a good job, and it was she who really pulled us all through the eight years. I was unemployed and on the dole. I knew my daddy didn't have much, and he let us know he didn't have much. When we eventually got the Green Cross money from the local republicans, it was a godsend. I was only on £9 a week unemployment benefit and I had to make sure that I kept about £2 aside out of my dole money to fund the extra parcel costs. Now, my father would never have known that. The only thing my brother needed was new clothes and they weren't the expensive ones. But if he needed anything, like clothes or paints for the art classes, we got it between us. We always managed it.

[RS] It was hard. The rest of the family didn't have much and so any time I would have visited them I would have brought some groceries, you know, just to help them get through. But that's what families are for. My daddy was good to us in rearing us; that's the way I look at it.

[RW] Even though he was inside, the house was constantly raided. Anything ever happened you knew you were going to get raided right away.

[RS] Before he went in we were raided maybe every fortnight. Once a new regiment arrived into the area we knew we were going to be raided at four in the morning, which wasn't nice. You were always waiting for the battering on the front door; it was quite frightening. And my school-bag was always searched.

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† In 1982/83 police use of over two dozen informers ('supergrasses') led to the conviction of some 600 members of Republican and Loyalist paramilitary organisations. Most of these were released on appeal and the system itself was ended in 1985.

[RW] You just kept to within the Republican community – other families who had men inside. Nobody else really knew anything about your real circumstances. Often they had no interest. As long as it didn't come to their doors. As long as it wasn't their sons.

[RW] I must say that the shopkeepers within the community were really good to people in our situation, for many families had loved ones interned. The butcher for one was really helpful. Now, we didn't get food for nothing, but he gave it to people at a reduced price. Then there was a man and wife who had a wee shop which sold clothing, and they would have give us socks and things... you couldn't have asked for better people.

[RS] You just focused. Our men were out to protect our community and we supported them. That was our reality. We knew why they were in there; you just wished it wasn't your husband, son or brother who was in. But that was life in our community – that was the way it was.

[RW] Now, he never said to me what happened to him, but years later wee bits and pieces came out. He was subjected to sleep deprivation, and constant noise. Then they were blindfolded and put into helicopters. They were told they were hundreds of feet up in the air and then they were pushed out! In actual fact the helicopter had come back down to a half-dozen feet or so off the ground. Now, think of what they went through during that experience! Jesus! Think of what was going through their minds. And yet he never ever talked about what he had went through. It only began to come out bit by bit much later.

[LM] My son got seventeen years. I think there was a lot of the mothers thought they would never see their sons out again. I happened to have the radio on, and didn't even know his case was up in court that day. And when I heard that he got a stipulated sentence, I squealed the place down, and the neighbours came running in to see what was wrong with me. I just couldn't believe it.

[LW] You never expect that your husband is going to jail. You don't expect that. You don't want to think that far ahead. You know there's a possibility they could, but you always hope it won't happen. I think it's even harder on a mother for her son to go inside: I remember my husband's mother saying to me that it just broke her heart. It got to the point she even found it hard to go on a visit. Because sometimes when she would have went up they would have been sitting with black eyes, wrists swollen out to here when they would have got beatings by the prison staff. I think for a mother it is harder. No matter what age they are they're always going to be your wee children.

[RW] But, we got to live through it and we raised our kids; we had another two children after he came out. I just told the children: "Your daddy hasn't done any wrong, he hasn't done any harm to anybody; it's just the way it is in this country." We were living in a housing estate at that time. Now, I had been offered an old farm outside Belfast; they owned horses, and if I looked after them I wouldn't be charged any rent. I had more or less turned it down, but it was still open to us. Then our eldest son – he was thirteen – came in one day and said, "Mummy, am I a Stickie† or a Provie?" I said, "You are a Catholic, son, and that's all you need to be." After he said that I sat down and said to my husband, "I'm going to take up that offer in the country and move ourselves away to hell out of here." Which we did. We moved out of Belfast and took on the farm. It was hard. For a start there was no electricity; I had to take the battery out of the car and wire up a light from it. But I was so glad to get them away out of Belfast. Also, the hunger strike was on and I did not want any of my kids to be affected by the emotions being stirred up at that time. So I just up and went to this house in the country which had no electricity, it had nothing really. It was hard on my kids, they had to rise at half six in the morning for the bus to get to school. But they have got through it, they have all married now, bought their own homes and are all doing well. If I had stayed in Belfast I don't know what would have happened, the boys might have got involved in what was going on. It wasn't the neighbours we wanted away from – it was the politics.

Prison visits

Prison visits were times of stress – the hassle of getting to the prison, the cold treatment by the prison system, the heartache of the visit itself – but also times of renewed support from the other families.

[LM] The way we were treated, the visitors, when we were going up to see our sons, wasn't very nice.

[LW] I found that very difficult too. As far as I was concerned we were all victims of circumstance – the wives, the mothers, the partners – but we were treated as if we were dirt on the shoes of the screws – prison warders, whatever you want to call them.

[LW] The prison authorities were really ignorant to you: "That's not allowed in, nor that..." with no explanation as to why it wasn't. And rather than saying,

† Nickname given to supporters of the Official wing of the IRA, after they began to wear self-adhesive Easter lily badges at Easter Rising commemorations, as opposed to supporters of the Provisional IRA who sported paper-and-pin badges.

"Excuse me, you can't send that in", they kind of just threw it back at you.

[RS] It used to upset us when they were examining the kids. Even a newborn baby, they would search its nappy. That was awful.

[LW] You used to stand outside the Crumlin Road jail waiting for your visit. Right on the Crumlin Road. And at first I would be embarrassed standing there, because cars were driving up and down, and you're standing there in a queue. Apart from the stigma that was attached to going to the jail, you didn't want to be recognised... I worked in a Catholic area, the only Protestant, and I'm trying to look away as cars were going past. No shelter, no nothing, and they never opened that gate until 2 o'clock on the button. Then when you got in, it could sometimes take an hour by the time you booked your parcel in and got searched. And there was no pleasantness, no civility about the prison staff. And these were men standing there with 'Ulster' tattoos on their arms, men who lived in the area, so any preconceived notions that Nationalists might have that the Loyalist community was treated differently, they can forget it – we certainly were not. I was always there early, I would have been the first in. I thought: if I get in early few cars will see me going down the road. One day I sat nearly two hours in a tiny waiting room and I kept asking them: "Look, is my visit not called?" At ten-to-four they come to me and told me I wasn't getting a visit, because he was away to Castlereagh or that he was 'on the boards'†. Yet they could have told me that at 2 o'clock at the gate.

[RM] I hated the travelling; it always seemed so far to Magilligan. Most days in the minibus, I was sick by the time I arrived. Then another of my sons was lifted and put in Crumlin Road. So between running from one prison to the other to visit them, there were days you were that tired. And at that time they didn't wash their own clothes, you had to do their washing and bring it up to them.

[LM] One thing I remember was that when I went to put my arms round him when I was leaving he pushed me away, and it wasn't until later that he told me in a letter the reason: he didn't want to break down in front of the other lads. And some of his letters and the things that he said would have broke your heart.

[RD] My mum was pregnant with me when my dad went inside. He got out when I had just turned seven. I remember – although the memories are vague – going up to the jail every Monday to see him. I remember him giving me a hug and kiss, but, to be honest, at that time the big thing about prison visits was that I always got a bag of cheese & onion crisps, a Mars bar and a tin of Coke. To me, that was my Monday: to go up there and get that, rather than the emphasis on going up to see

† A solitary confinement punishment block where all items of furniture had been removed from the cells. The prisoner was given a mattress in the evening but this was taken away each morning.

your daddy. I think it was probably because he went inside before I was born and I hadn't been able to establish a real relationship with him. I have other memories of when I was younger. Me, my mum and my sister all slept in the same bed. Although we had a spare room we never slept in it. We slept in the one bed, I suppose from a sense of security. But at the time the lack of a father figure didn't impact on me, the way it might have if I had known him before he went in. I can't remember whether I spoke about him in school. I know later on I would have told friends that he was inside, for there were a lot of my friends whose fathers would have been in jail as well. We were all in the same boat; most people to whom I might have said that my daddy had done time in jail would have told me that their father, or their uncle, or somebody close to them, had also done time.

[LM] I can remember that, when visiting Long Kesh, you went inside this corrugated iron hut, and the floor was soaking, the wind was coming in, the place was freezing, there were no heaters or anything. And you sat there for ages before you were called in for your visit. And the way they called out your name you just felt as if you were dirt. I remember one time I sat down beside my son and the next thing was: "Up! You're not allowed to sit there! Go to the other side of the table." Nor was I allowed to put my hand out towards his or they would have been on top of me right away. They would probably have been thinking I was trying to pass him something. The visits were not nice. You tried to make something positive out of them, but they weren't nice at all.

[LW] I mean, I remember, when he went into jail, his friend saying to me: "You'll get into a routine with the visits, don't worry." And I thought: how would you ever get into a routine of going up to jail? But you do get into a routine, and your life becomes that visit, three times a week or whatever, and you build your life around it.

[LW] From '76 you were allowed to send in cooked meats, biscuits, apples, oranges; you were allowed to cook them steak and sausages and take up sixty cigarettes. But then they cut that out and after a while you weren't allowed all that food because people were smuggling things inside the food. But that was a hard time, whenever you had three parcels a week to get.

[RW] I just got on with things. His family were good, as were my own family, and one of them would have baby-sat. But you never had any money or anything. My own family hadn't known that he was in an organisation, but they were supportive of him – they used to say: well, at least he has a pair of balls. I never really bothered with anybody, just kept myself to myself. We used to go to the [Quaker-run] canteens and the kids would have played in the crèche there. And

if you needed any help you would have gone to the organisation. But at the end of the day you just had to get on with things.

[LW] The organisation would have provided so much but there was so many men from the area inside you couldn't go to them all the time and say, "Look, he needs new jeans." And you felt like a beggar, so you wouldn't have done it. Nevertheless, in our area the organisation was very good with their prisoners' families. More so than with some other areas. And they would have bought them extra things, like at Christmas.

[LW] You were supposed to get a half-hour for visits, but you were lucky if you got that, you maybe only got twenty minutes. It depended on the mood of whoever was on, or if they were changing shifts. The worst times were when there was tension. He was in the Crum in the early '90s; that's when they started fighting quite seriously for segregation – the Crum then was a real hotbed. At times when the violence going on out on the streets was at its height I heard some families say that they felt almost relieved whenever their husband or son was put in prison because at least they knew where he was, but because of what was going on in the Crum at the time the fear factor was just as great for us. And you went up hoping he actually got to the visit without bumping into a Republican and getting into a digging match, because that was the Loyalist attitude then: see one, hit one – even though they were outnumbered three to one by Republicans. I spent my time listening to the radio to hear if more trouble had broken out.

[LW] An added problem during times when there was a lot going on inside the prison – or during the supergrass trials – was that visits were one of the few ways the men could communicate with the outside, and you maybe spent most of the time being told what was happening to certain prisoners, and acting as a carrier pigeon to take messages to people on the outside. Before you knew it your visit was over and you came out feeling you hadn't had a visit at all.

[LW] The ones with their husbands, partners or sons in jail, you sort of had the same circle of people and within that everybody helped each other. Times were hard. Maybe one wife was coming round to tell you something you had to tell somebody else, so everybody got to know everybody else. You also knew other wives from being on the visits, and you had laughs with them as well. If you hadn't had laughs you would have been driven insane.

[LM] I remember the bus breaking down on the way to Long Kesh, with everybody standing at the side of the road. And a van stopped and the driver must have known who our driver was, for he said: "Tell them all to climb in the back." And we did, but there were no seats and we had to sit on the floor of the van and

we were bumping around all over the place. You did have some nice things to remember, but most of what I can remember, from the start of the Troubles up until my son was released, was a nightmare. It was just a nightmare for me and it must have been the same for a lot of families – on both sides.

[LW] Yes, I can remember when the bus broke down and you had to get out and walk through the snow; and then when you arrived at the visitors' canteen their water was froze and you got no tea. And you missed the morning visit and they wouldn't let you in until the afternoon. And you had to wait there in the cold. So you were out of the house from eight o'clock that morning and weren't getting your visit till the afternoon which meant you weren't home to late in the day.

[LM] There was a protest, there was some Loyalists went on the same type of protest the Republicans went on. One of them was my son, and I remember some journalist coming and asking me if we had a photograph of him. I gave them one of him in his Army uniform. And the next night I saw it in the *Belfast Telegraph*. So I thought then, and his young sister thought, that he was going to do what the Republicans had done, and be on it until he died. And I had some job consoling her.... She cried her eyes out, sobbed her heart out. There were a lot of bad patches like that throughout the time that he was inside, and I had to get treatment because of my nerves and things. I can always remember having to take tablets before I could go to see him in prison.

[RW] I was really scared of the feuds. I remember one time there was a bitter feud going on but fortunately he was in jail at the time. Most of the friends that he and I knew are now all dead. So he was in the better place.

[LW] With only getting half an hour for your visit you didn't get much of a chance to talk about anything other than family things, the weather – anything but problems at home.

[LW] Yes, your half hour was precious to you, so you didn't want to talk about troubles, or any difficulties with the kids or whatever, everything was glossed over. Anyway, they were getting it tough enough within the system. The last thing you wanted to do was give them more anxiety. I mean, what could they do if your ceiling fell in? Nothing. So why tell them about it? What could they do about financial problems? Nothing. So why even bother them; they had enough trouble to worry about within the jail system, and to try and stay alive within it, especially in the Crum during the fight for segregation.

[RW] You never told them about problems at home. You kept everything to yourself. You always hid from them if you were going through any difficulties. Told them nothing.

[RS] But the men were the same. They never said anything was wrong inside. Everything was great. And yet there was a hell of a lot going on in there, and they never said a thing.

[RW] I never told him of any problems, just kept them to myself. There was no point in giving him any more worry. There were constant financial difficulties but I never told him. He just assumed that my mummy or his ones would have helped you out. And they did try to help, but it was hard for them too, for nobody had much money in them days. I don't think the prisoners were really aware of the burden on their families, I don't think they fully realised. To be honest, he would never ask for anything; the only thing he wanted up was the *Irish News*. We brought up a wee food parcel, biscuits and fruit. And his mummy was very good, she often brought parcels for him as well. So it wasn't too bad, but the kids and I still had it tight, and I didn't like borrowing from people all the time.

[LM] I remember one time he said to me: "Mummy, could you afford to get me a gold chain for Christmas?" And I said to him: "Do you realise how hard it is at home?" He couldn't understand how hard a life we were having. He didn't get his gold chain. And the parcels, they got very little. The boys were allowed to put money into savings. And I can remember he would have saved that up for his sister, she was very young then, and then sent it out for somebody to buy a Christmas present for her.

[RM] Not everyone wanted to 'stand by their man'. I went over to the wife of one of my sons to tell her that he had just been lifted. And when I said I would arrange for her to get the Green Cross, she said: "You needn't get me any Green Cross, I won't be going to visit him, I'll not be making him parcels. He had no call to get himself into trouble." Well, that hurt me. And she never did. Eventually him and her separated, and she's away now in Australia.

[RS] There was brilliant camaraderie between the relatives going up on the visits. We all looked out for each other. If anybody came out crying after seeing their loved one, we were over right away offering support.

[RM] I know I was doing things which I shouldn't have been. I was feeding lads who were on the run, letting them sleep in the house, letting them get washed, but that was all. The only other thing was that I got involved with the Green Cross, to try and help the ones inside. At first they started out with £3 a week, but that wouldn't have bought much. Then it went up to £8, although by that time a good lot were out and they could give more to the ones left inside.

[LW] On the more negative side, in a sense you're taken for granted. They just

assume that we'll manage somehow. How many of our husbands during the last twenty-odd years have turned round and said: "How *did* you cope? What did you feel?" You couldn't go up to the jail and tell him that you lay in bed crying at having such a lonely life.

[LW] Which you did manys a time. You'd come walking home after a visit, and the tears tripping you as you walked down the Crumlin Road. You didn't want to cry during the visit because you didn't want to upset them.

[LW] They assumed that because you were able to carry on that everything in the garden was rosy. But it wasn't, it was far from rosy.

[LM] I think they thought that we were being well enough looked after, but nobody really came to your door. I can never recall anyone – except the paramilitary organisation – coming to my door to try and help in any way. I am Presbyterian and I remember asking my minister if he would go up to see my son. I kept asking my son: "Has anybody from the church been up to see you yet?" For whenever you went up you seen priests going to see those on the Republican side; indeed, plenty of them going up to visit. But I never remember seeing any ministers up visiting. My minister didn't say he *wouldn't* go up, he just never bothered. We got a new minister and he eventually went up to see him. I can remember that for a long time, there was nobody, and the politicians didn't give a damn.

[LW] The paramilitary community – their wives, families – they looked after each other, and would have organised your visits. And your social life was just with the wives of the prisoners. But outside of that, if your neighbour had no connection with the paramilitaries they wouldn't really have bothered with you.

[LM] At the beginning of the Troubles, most people thought that they would have to become involved in what was happening in the country, but you never think of it coming to your own door, you never think of any of your children being taken away from you.

[LW] Looking back, you think: how did I do it? But you done it.

[RM] Nobody knows what we went through. Now, I didn't work, but to keep them all up with whatever they needed I had to go into work. But it was a constant strain. I was running to three prisons at the same time. I was running up to the Crumlin Road, to Long Kesh and to Magilligan. And there were nights when I knelt at the side of my bed and asked God to give me the strength to get through another day.

Returning home again

Readjustment to family life after a long spell of imprisonment could often throw up numerous problems, both for the ex-prisoners and their family members.

[LW] I lived with my parents while he was inside; then, about a year before he was released, we got our own house. But my daughter still stayed with my mummy and daddy; they were almost like her parents too. When her daddy came out she would only have stayed with us now and then. He was only out about six weeks when the house was shot up, and that was it – she wouldn't come back and live with us at all after that.

[LW] They find it strange at first when they come out. I think they lose all track of time while they're inside. Time stands still. And they still think to this day that the children are younger.

[RS] You'd almost think they still saw us all as the same age as we were when they went in.

[RW] Even in themselves, they stayed younger.

[LW] For some reason they think they are still twenty.

[LW] And kids often resent it when their daddy comes home: who's he to be telling me what I can or can't do? The children are used to the mother being the role model and the authority figure: she has been the one who set the ground rules, not him.

[RD] My mummy had prepared us for when my daddy did eventually get out: he's going to be coming home in a couple of months, he's going to be living with us soon.... To us, it was a bit of excitement, and although it was so long ago now and I can't really remember back to then, but I think I was expecting some sort of Santa figure: life was going to be so much better financially, there was going to be a man in the house and we were going to have a new suite and all sorts of different goodies. And, to be fair, when he did get out things did drastically change. For the better. Obviously, there were things we found hard getting used. When he came out things started to be a bit more regimented; he was quite strict about different things, and you maybe weren't as free to do things the way you would have done when there was just you and your mummy.

[LW] My husband does have a good relationship with his kids, but the father-daughter relationship that I had with my daddy, which was precious to me, I think is different to his.

[RS] When my brother was lifted we lived in one of the old housing estates, and during the eight years he was in prison our estate underwent redevelopment. The wee kitchen house that he was lifted out of was demolished and a brand new house with a bathroom built in its place. He came out to a totally different environment. I don't think he could cope with the changes for a while. On his first days out he and I just walked around the area because everything was so new to him.

[RW] My mum used to tell me: "Keep those children quiet now, he's been used to the quiet in the Kesh, don't be letting them make a noise." And I said, "*He's not been used to it!* I had to get used to it for all these years without him, and *he'll* now have to get used to it too!" But I remember the day he got out of Long Kesh and I saw him walk down Leeson Street, and the sole on one of his shoes was flapping against the pavement. I will never forget that shoe.

[LM] He was a teenager when he went to prison, and when he came out he was a man. I thought I was never going to see him out. Now, thank goodness he is out, but he is a changed person. He is not the person he was when he went into jail. He used to be able to talk to us, have a laugh, carry on, but now when he comes to visit he doesn't seem to be able to talk to his father and me at all; it's just a quick run in and out. He doesn't seem to want us to talk about anything to do with the Troubles, he doesn't want to hear about it at all, about anything that has happened in the past. I thought that he would have needed a wee bit of counselling but he wouldn't have anything to do with it. So, at the minute... I would love him to open up and talk, but he won't. He is a changed person, and that upsets me a lot.

[LW] Everything in their life is about their time inside, all their memories: "When we were in jail, when we..." They don't seem to have any memories prior to that. If you're out with friends you would never hear them say, "Me and her did this or that"... their talk is always about jail.

[LW] Before he went to jail, we had a great life, a ball, we really did; we would maybe have been out a couple of nights at the weekend, socialising here and there. But they come back out and despite their promises not to get involved again, they do, and you're back to square one!

[LW] That was my experience too. "The next time I get out I'll spend all my time with you." Not a bit of it! He was soon back associating with his mates.

[LW] When our husbands came out of prison we did have these high expectations: life was going to be better, things would be different. I think they meant well, but they just got re-involved again; they just picked up where they left off years before, because time had stood still for them.

[LW] First time he done four years, was out six months, went back for two. Then I think he was out for a year and he went back. And he was only out from that when he went back in again! Twelve years he done in total.

[LW] Mine went in in the late seventies. Did four years, and he was only out six months and went in and done another eighteen. Back in again, then in and out; his last was in 2003.

[RW] Once he came out he swore to me that he would never get actively involved again, and as far as I know he never did. He still talks politics with his friends. Talks and talks.

[LM] My son was inside seventeen years before he got any parole. And when he came out, I can remember that day clearly. Everybody was there to welcome him, but I was in hysterics, seeing him coming into the house. I saw him sitting with my daughter on his knee and the other children, and they were all crying. And he was promising what he would do to make up for the length of time he was away, but they don't seem to be able to keep their promises. I think it was because of what happened to him. I went through a very bad time. I actually done a life sentence along with him. And I would never like to see the rest of my children get involved in this type of thing. But at that time most of the lads got involved, there was very few didn't.

[LW] Very few. I think West Belfast had the highest ratio of ones in jail of the different areas. For such a small road, the like of the Shankill, they had the highest number of people from organisations inside.

[LW] My husband would tend to overcompensate by giving the kids too much money and I have to remind him that we don't always have it. His major, major regret is that he missed out on the kids growing up. He tries to make up now with the grandchildren, but if you were to ask him what was his major regret, it would be missing out on his girls. Don't get me wrong, he has a good relationship with them, but it's not the father-daughter bond he knows it could have been.

[RD] I remember when my daddy got out. I can laugh about this now, but I used to suck a dummy right up until I was seven. And I remember my mummy saying to me: "You're going to have to get rid of that dummy before your daddy gets out." Any time we went up to jail she would never let me take one with me. And then when mummy threw them out I remember crying my eyes out, and feeling a bit resentful towards him: this is my dummy and just because he's out I have to throw it away! And I remember he found one at the back of the chair and I think it was the first time he ever shouted at me. I remember running out of our flat crying my

eyes out, and hating the fact that he was out – over something as simple as throwing your dummy away!

[LW] If you asked my husband he would say he has lived his life. "If I went tomorrow," he would say, "I have lived my life." And sometimes I think that is selfish. It's only now the past eight to ten years that we have begun to do normal things, like go on holiday.

[LM] I kept saying "Sorry, I'm sorry". I don't know how many times I've said that to the rest of my family. I think they lost out because of the way I was feeling about him. Especially the wee girl, because she was very young when it happened. I tried but he was always there in my mind. I thought I was doing all right for them until those years past and I realised what they lost out on because of him being in jail. I'm trying to make up for it now, especially with the youngest one, my daughter. Maybe I'm doing too much, and intruding into her life too much. I kept saying 'sorry' but, at the same time, do I really need to say 'sorry'? At that time I didn't know what was happening to me. The hurtful part is that I imagine the rest of my family are not able to talk to me the way they should be able to, because of what I went through when he was in prison. I imagine that they're now hiding things from me, and can't open up and talk to me in case they tell me something which would set me off worrying about them, or feel guilty again for not giving them the attention they should have got. I do still worry a lot about them all, but especially him: I would love to hear him opening up and telling me the way he feels, because I don't know what is going on in his mind.

[LW] In the early days there were no such thing as counselling services. And even the professionals who were there – doctors, teachers, others – hadn't a clue what to do for you, or often didn't want to know. We were largely abandoned by society.

[RW] I think the children were a bit scared of him when he eventually did come home. One thing he would have done was to go through cupboards – take everything out of them, then put everything back. That was when he came out, he's not so bad now. He said it was probably because he was confined in a small space and got so used to taking everything out of his prison cupboard and then putting it back again. This went on for about two years after he got out; I don't think he realised he done it.

[RD] One of the first things which also happened was that me and my sister got moved into the spare room. And that was the first time I had ever slept in that room, and I remember feeling afraid at not being with my mummy. And these were all things that made me slightly resentful towards him being there. My mum ended up going out to work and he stayed at home to look after us, but at times you felt

you couldn't do anything, you were always getting shouted at – for he was much stricter than my mum. Sometimes when I am arguing with my dad – and I don't really mean to do this, for I know it winds him up – I'll say: "Well, sure you weren't even there for me the first six years of my life, and those are the most crucial years." Now, my father and my younger brother have a really close bond – my dad is the one who looks after him 24/7. And sometimes, even at the age of 27, I would be a bit envious at the closeness of their relationships, and think: well, I was never like that with him. It's not that I have lost anything, just that I never really got started on a proper father-daughter relationship until my late teens.

[LW] They know that they missed out on so much. And we missed out on all those things too. We sacrificed a big part of our lives because they become our lives. Many times I felt I was losing my own identity. I wasn't me any more, I was an extension of him. Your life is built around him.

Experience of the 'other' community

How did the conflict impact upon attitudes and perceptions held about the 'other community'? What was the experience before the Troubles, and now?

[LM] We didn't bring our children up to be bitter; where we lived at the time they actually played across the road in Ballymurphy with Catholics; they were never ever brought up to be bitter. But when they were older they saw what was happening to their country, and that's why they got involved.

[RM] There was one wee woman I knew from the Shankill; she and I used to send each other Christmas cards, but that stopped a few years ago. I often wonder whether I should go up the Shankill and see if she is still alive.

[LW] My husband went to school in Somerdale, and had to pass Ardoyne every day. And their buses would get stoned and windows broken by Catholics. He lived on the Woodvale and as the Troubles got worse many of the men formed groups to defend the area, and that's how it snowballed. They thought that they were protecting their area and doing what was right for their country and community. It was never about sectarianism. And they were young at the time. Okay, they're in their fifties now and their attitudes have changed; they'd turn round now and say, yes, looking back we'd probably try and do things differently. But they still have the same conviction that what they done at the time was for their community, and they believed it was right.

[RW] I have no contacts now with people from the Protestant community. In my younger days I worked with plenty of Protestants. My experience, however, wasn't always good. When I was about nineteen I worked for this handkerchief manufacturer. I had no problems with the Protestant girls I worked alongside, until it came to the Twelfth. And the whole place was coming down with flags and bunting; they even made a wee arch! Now, each worker had their own desk where they did their stitching or packing, and this bunting was put all over my desk too! And I said, "I have no objection to you all having this stuff – but I won't have it over my desk. So, I won't be working today; I'll be back when that stuff is taken away." And they took it down all right, but a month later I was sacked. They said there wasn't enough work to keep me going.

[RM] My husband was not a political man in any way. He had friends on the Shankill Road, he had friends in Sandy Row, and we often went over there. My milkman was from Sandy Row and he came in here to deliver my milk. My coalman was a Protestant and he came in here too. I was reared with Protestants all my life; I lived in Protestant streets, I lived down the Grosvenor Road in a mixed street. In fact, there may have been more Protestants in it than Catholics. When I got married I moved round into a Protestant street and I got on well with all my neighbours. There might have been one or two that were a wee bit bitter... but apart from them I got on well with everyone. In fact, the day I left to come up here, a few of the Protestant neighbours said to me: "We're sorry you and your children are going; you're taking the light of the street with you."

[LW] I had a really good Catholic friend years ago. After I left school I went to Rupert Stanley college in Tower Street, and there was a girl who went there, Carol, who was from Andersonstown. And me and her got on absolutely brilliant; me and her were always seen together. And when my son was born she was the first one at my door with a gift. Sadly, over the years we lost touch with one another.

[LM] I had plenty of Catholic friends at the start of the Troubles. But because of what happened, and having to move, you lost touch. And because of the Troubles you couldn't go to where they were living because you were afraid of somebody knowing your religion and maybe something happening. But through the years, despite what was going on, I still remained friendly with Catholics. It wasn't the ordinary Catholic person that I had anything against; it was the terrorists in the Provos. They were the ones I was really against, and still am in a way because of what happened to our country and to our husbands, brothers and sons. And look where they are at the minute. They have got their place in government and they are trying now to tell us what to do, after trying to destroy our country. And because of them trying to destroy our country I lost my son... I mean, he's just not the same person, so it's like as if I have lost him.

[LW] We weren't sectarian in our family. It wasn't the ordinary Catholic we were against. I have worked with Catholics. It's like everything in life: there's good and there's bad, but the Republican element, the like of the Provos and what they stood for and what they wanted to do, that's what we were against. And that's one reason why we supported our husbands, because we could see where they were coming from.

[RM] One of my sons worked in Mackies and one day there was a bullet left on his workbench. I told him he wasn't going back. I went down and I took the bullet with me. I just walked in through the main gates and asked for the boss. I told him I was down to enquire about my son. I said, "How did that bullet get put on his desk? Youse have a room in there and he's not allowed into it, but all the Protestants can go into it. Are they making bullets?" He said: "How did you get in here?" I told him that I just walked in. I said to him, "My son won't be back." And he said, "Well, he's a very conscientious worker and he's in here early every morning." And I said, "But what are you going to do about that bullet?" He said, "That's got nothing to do with me." So I wouldn't let him go back. And then I brought my other son out of it as well. So they lost their jobs.

[RS] I am glad to see it the way it is now. My husband worked with Protestants all his life, worked in Protestant areas. I have one granddaughter and she knows nothing about the Troubles. She used to go to a school near a Protestant area. She would see the Union Jacks as we drove past the Ravenhill Road, and she would say, "God, look at all these flags, granny." And I would say, "But it's their festival, just like ours in another couple of weeks." I would never turn round and say 'Prods' or 'Orangies' or anything like that there. I live in the Short Strand and we hear the bands, because we're surrounded by Loyalists. She hears them but doesn't ask anything. I prefer it being that way, and I hope all the children growing up now are the same. To me, it's a better way of life, a better way to be. Instead of walking into the town and grabbing your children in the middle of a bomb scare.

[RW] My father-in-law is Protestant. We've all got mixed backgrounds. Having said that, you couldn't get a Catholic to go and live on the Shankill Road. Protestants would be safer on our side, than a Catholic living on their side.

[RS] I have uncles who were in the British Army; they were killed in the war.

[RS] When I was in Holland on a cross-community trip I was placed in a host-parent house with a Protestant girl. She was a year and a half older than me and she really looked after me, as if I was her wee sister.

[RS] I'm a care worker and for some years now I have been working with both

sections of the community. And some of the Protestant families I visit know that my daughter is involved in Irish dancing. And I believe that they are genuine when they ask me, "What about your wee girl – was she dancing somewhere at the weekend?" Indeed, most of the Protestant people I have worked with have showed me so much respect, at times more than the Catholic community, some of whom have treated me like a doormat, treated me like an absolute slave. I am proud that I have got a few of them interested in Irish dancing in a way they might not have been before.

[RW] There are an awful lot of bitter people out there. A hell of a lot of them.

[RM] A terrible lot of sad things happened. Many people suffered. And what people done to each other during the conflict was awful. But one side, I suppose, was as bad as the other.

[LW] We would have went to the Peace House. As the 'peace process' developed people would have brought Catholic and Protestant women to meet one another over a weekend in Corrymeela. However, we would have kept more to ourselves, and they would have kept more to themselves; we would have sat with them having a meal but that would have been it really.

Undiminished memories

Some of the family members recalled a few experiences – from the comic to the tragic – which they have never forgotten.

[RM] I had a cat. And that cat let me know when the Brits were coming! He would have got up onto the windowsill and would have walked up and down, very agitated. When they eventually came in he would run into the hot-press and hide away at the back of it. And a soldier said to me one time, "Why does your cat run whenever we come in?" I said, "He doesn't like youse." He said, "Well, I knew the dogs didn't like us, but I never knew the cats didn't like us."

[RW] During visits I used to smuggle wee love letters out – written on tiny bits of cigarette paper. I'll never forget the time he had given me one and I forgot to take it out of my jeans when I returned home. And the next week when I went up they searched me and found it. They took me to a police station in Lisburn. Now, I had never been in a police station in my life; it was the most frightening thing. I was taken there in the back of a police car and somebody had to take the kids home. They questioned me about the letter, claiming he was trying to smuggle information to people outside. The Harry Kirkpatrick supergrass trial

was going on at the time, and maybe they thought they'd find something in my letter about it, but there was nothing. After two hours they let me go. It was one of the worst experiences I ever had. I had to make my own way home.

[RM] There was one terrible experience I had. My daughter was coming up the street carrying a wee parcel. And this soldier, who was on foot patrol, ran over and demanded to see what was in it. He was so threatening that my daughter squealed because she thought he was going to shoot her. We opened the parcel – it was a miniskirt. And I said to him: "Is that what you were going to shoot her for? A wee miniskirt?" "I'll shoot them," he said, "whether they be man, woman or child." And with that he put his gun to his shoulder, and shot a man who was walking up the street – right through the head! I got a terrible shock! I ran up the stairs to get a blanket to put over the man – he was dead. A jeep came speeding over and took the soldier away. Then the ambulance and police came. I had to go down to Springfield Road barracks and make a statement. I told them the truth – I told them there wasn't another soul in the street. But when it went to court I was never called as a witness, and the solder's defence was that there was a 'hostile crowd' in the street and he had no option but to shoot. That was a total lie. He was sitting there outside the courtroom when I came out, and I went over to him and I says: "Well, you got away with it, with that judge. But I'm going to tell you something: see the judge that you have to meet above, you'll not get past him." I never went for counselling over that. Nor my daughter, she was only fourteen, it was an awful shock to her. No-one ever came to see us about it. Only a priest.

[RW] I remember them shooting CS gas into Leeson Street. I was sitting there with a bucket of water to splash over the kids' faces, to take the sting out of their eyes and mouths. I lived directly opposite a pub in McDonald Street, and I remember one night a Saracen [armoured vehicle] arrived and parked right up against my door. And I watched the soldiers smash their way into the pub and set about robbing it! They were taking out crates of Teacher's Whisky, and other drink – as well as a big bottle full of money donated to charity – and loading them into the back of the Saracen. I remember the officer asking me to sign this form. I'm not sure what it was for. Maybe they were expecting me to confirm that they broke into that pub because they had to – they were probably trying to pretend that there was a sniper inside. I refused to sign anything.

[RW] I marched down to the Lower Falls during the Curfew†, because my mother

† On 3 July 1970, when soldiers searched a house in the Lower Falls Road, rioting ensued and hundreds of troops then sealed off the area. The episode became known as the 'Falls Curfew' and the Army maintained the curfew for 34 hours. The Official IRA decided to take on the Army and three civilians died in gun battles. 1,600 canisters of CS gas were fired into the area. The curfew was finally lifted when 1000 women from surrounding areas marched in carrying milk and bread.

in-law lived there, as well as his aunt, his cousins... they all lived in the Lower Falls. People were furious. How dare they call a curfew on those people! Children with no milk, no bread, no nothing; and the women not allowed out to shop or anything. How dare they! That would never have happened in any town in England. There would have been an outcry. But it was alright to do it to us 'Paddies'.

Conflict, peace and sectarianism

What thoughts did the family members have about the conflict they had endured, and for which their loved ones had gone to prison? And did they feel optimistic or pessimistic about the future?

[LW] When you look at our husbands, they never would have been where they were if it hadn't been for the conflict. For they all come from good homes.

[LW] Yes, they did it because they believed in what they were doing, and we supported them.

[LW] As things escalated one side became as brutal as the other. Now, you didn't ignore the brutality, but it just seemed to be a consequence of what we were all living through. And whether it was your husband or your son who was involved you just supported them, you stood by them. In an ideal world these things wouldn't have happened, but it's not an ideal world and that's just the road we all ended up going down.

[RW] There was quite a lot happened to me in the area I lived in, as regards the Provies, because I did not see their point of view. My husband and I were not for armed struggle, we did not believe in it. We always thought: Christ Almighty, we've had 800 years of trying with violence and we've failed, so why continue with it, for it's going to be a failure at the end of the day. Why not try something different? Why not get into real politics, fight the system that way? My children know nothing at all about Republicanism, they certainly got nothing from us. And I am happy about that. They've all grown up now; their main priority is looking after their families.

[RW] When my husband was in jail he had plenty of time to reflect, including about the things he done to other people. He has talked about that. Now, he mightn't say to anyone, but I know he regrets it. He enjoyed the meetings which led to the previous pamphlet.† He said he couldn't believe the things which were

† Island Pamphlet No. 92, *Preventing a return to conflict.*

coming out. You have to be comfortable, before things will come out. Once somebody opens up, others will follow. Then people can be more honest.

[RM] So many of the murders that happened on both sides should never have happened. I never agreed with all that.

[RW] There's always going to be people – on both sides – who want to go back. And it's probably more the case that they don't want their positions taken away from them, which is robbing and stealing things, which they used to get away with years ago.

[RD] I remember when my dad had just got out of jail he took me to the local shops. We got to the bottom of the Shaw's Road and there were a few soldiers there who stopped him. I remember me being afraid, and my daddy saying: "Don't do this in front of my daughter." And them searching him. That was my first experience of the police or soldiers, and it was a very negative one. Before that, my mum had kept us from the political side of things. She never ever said, "Your daddy's inside because all police are bad men." But this was my first experience of the security forces.

[RM] Now, I'll tell you the God's honest truth. I would have said to my sons: "Don't let anyone ever come to my door and tell me youse have shot anybody. I'll have to live with it if somebody comes and tells me *youse* have been shot, but don't ever youse shot anybody, I don't want that." I'm very strong in my faith, and I don't believe in killing people, and I don't care who or what they are.

[LW] I think as they got older, our husbands' generation began to question things: do we really want this for our children? Because they were parents by then, and were saying: do we really want it to go on like this, can we not change it? Do we really need to keep going in and out of jail, do our kids need to do the same?

[LW] If people back then had been the way our husbands are now, things might have turned out different. To have the head on them to say: no, this isn't the road we should go down, we have to get this sorted.

[LM] And at that time most of the lads that were in thought that they were doing something for their country. But I think that when they came out and seen what was happening here, I think they began to think the opposite, I think they thought they had been fighting for nothing really.

[RS] But it's good to see people working together, and talking together. There's no difference between people, certainly not between the people in working-class areas. The difference is between all of us and those who live outside our communities in their big houses, up the Malone Road or Cultra or

wherever, who have used us to do their dirty work and manipulated us.

[RW] Looking back at the conflict, I don't feel it was worth it. All those people dead? People getting shot – what for, at the end of the day? Both sides have come through the same trauma. There's good and bad on both sides. Bitter ones as well. I wouldn't want things to go back to how they were. If I was out somewhere and young people were talking about getting involved I would tell them that they're not going to sort out anything through violence... people dying for what? The best thing is for people to sit around a table and sort it out through politics. The next generation might do it. The good thing is that people can be a bit more outspoken than they could have been years ago. It used to be you couldn't say anything: you'd have been tarred and feathered for saying the wrong things. Now there's a bit more free speech.

[LW] The likes of the DUP and the Paisleyites, I never had any time for them. For they were 'marching them up to the top of the hill and marching them down again' – and then when anything happened they disowned them. But it wasn't *their* sons who were going to prison.

[LM] That's right. That is still there with me. When I see some of those who were doing the shouting and yelling and getting lads all worked up, I really feel mad. Because look where they are now, after all that shouting and yelling and all those lads doing all that time in jail. I'm glad my son's doing a good thing now [cross-community work], and his brother too, and I wouldn't like to see other young ones going in for a long time in jail. I'm sure there were a lot of mothers who felt the same way as myself.

[LW] I think most of our politicians are out of touch with ordinary people. I remember a few years ago we were campaigning for an independent councillor and we were at one of the polling stations. A DUP member arrived up by car to give out her leaflets, and she says to the ones with her: "Where am I, where is this?" How can she stand there, handing out leaflets asking people to vote for her when she doesn't even know where she is! Just then two minibus-loads of pensioners from the church came along soon after she arrived, and immediately after they left she was away back into her car again. It was just to show them her face and give them her leaflets – and then away she went. What would *she* know about life in working-class areas?

[LM] My youngest, my daughter, is now 45; the boys are in their fifties. I would like to see their children getting a good future. But the things that are happening at the minute [dissident Republican attacks], even this arguing between the parties at Stormont, you wonder what is going to happen. The politicians always seem to be on edge as if everything is ready to break down again.

[RD] I think we have to see our politicians as being of some value, although a lot of them have their own agenda. For what other way is there to do it? If people vote them in then we must let them get on with it.

[RS] I voted the politicians in and I don't regret it. And I don't care if a certain person is on £50,000 a year, or £60,000 a year, I don't want my child going through what I went through. The happiest news I heard recently was the INLA giving that statement [getting rids of their weapons].

[LW] It is the community workers who have got us to where we are today. It has been a long road, but at least we're moving forward. If our husbands and sons, who fought the Republicans, and went to jail, can sit down and talk with them across the table, why can't the politicians? It wasn't *their* children, or *their* husbands, who went to jail – it was ours. Our husbands are prepared to sit across the table from Republicans if it leads to a better life for the next generation. What is the point of power-sharing if the politicians are still refusing to work with one another properly? They're playing wee games with our future and the hopes of the next generations. Nobody wants to go back. If Loyalists and Republicans can sit down why can't they? Okay, it might stick in the throat sometimes, but you don't always have to like somebody to be prepared to work constructively with them, if it's for the better. Why can't the politicians do that? *They* weren't fighting; *they* didn't go to jail. Why can't they get on with it?

[RD] I think it's great that my da works with Loyalists. It's the only way to move forward, to get the issues out there and discuss them. And they probably realise they've got more similarities than differences, and being able to look at issues which aren't just politics, but social issues, that everybody is worried about. The first thing you have to do is to build trust and respect one another.

[RW] To me most politics is the same old crap, it just goes round in circles. Kids have to learn how to debate things properly; maybe in community groups they could get them talking together.

[RD] We all have to think things through and talk things through. What I would like to say is that I was very fortunate, but I can imagine it being completely different. I was fortunate that when my dad was inside my mum was willing to wait for him, and that when he did come out it didn't take us long to get used to him, and that he has brought us up fair and has brought us up well. But I could have ended up with a father like many out there who have been badly affected from being in jail, and could have ended up bitter or maybe not bothered about me going to school. My dad was insistent: you're going to finish school, you're going to get an education. He had those values to give to me, but it could have been completely

different. Other young people who read this pamphlet might have come through more difficult experiences, especially if their father came out of prison and couldn't relate to his children. I think my dad realised that having spent all those years in jail because he was out there fighting, he now owed things to his children.

[LW] Sometimes I think many of the younger generation think they have missed out. They imagine the conflict was something exciting. The reality is that they have had a lucky escape, for there is nothing romantic about going to jail, nothing romantic about the conflict. Yes, the prisoners might have had a close camaraderie and had some laughs inside, but most of the time it was tough going and many young men spent most of their youth inside. And that is now lost to them, it will never be regained. Yet the kids of today don't see this side of it; they think it must have been wonderful.

[LM] That's why I get into trouble sometimes. I took to drink because I thought that drink would help me, but it didn't. And in our local club when I heard some of the young ones talking I lost my temper with them and just let go, and asked them: what would youse do if you ended up in prison for a long, long time? I was telling them the way I feel, and trying to prevent some of them getting involved. But it was like talking to a brick wall. They would have just said to me: how are you getting away with saying all this, without anybody putting you out? In a way I was trying to mother them, because I had effectively lost one of my sons; I was trying to prevent other young ones from getting involved. But at that time the Troubles were still bad and most of them got involved.

[LW] We have been out socially with our husbands and you would often get young lads who come over to us and say: "Tell us about your time in jail." And as our husbands would talk to these young lads you could see that they were sitting there mesmerised. Our husbands would be saying: "I remember the time when we did this... and remember we had a laugh doing that...." Eventually they realised they were making it all sound too romantic, so then they began to say: "Look, we might have had a laugh there, but this is the reality of it...." And they would then try to describe the bad times.

[LW] Aye, like when somebody threw boiling water over my husband.

[LW] There's nothing romantic about that.

[RM] I would tell young people nowadays to think of what they are putting their mothers and fathers through. We have to suffer for what our young ones are doing. When I think of the nights we sat here in fear... I wouldn't like to go through it all again. All the house-raiding. Some soldiers were okay, some were nasty. When they raided my house one time they deliberately smashed my washing machine.

And where are we now because of it all? We're no better off. Look at Stormont. They are a load of cowboys up there. And I'm not only talking about one side, the whole lot of them are. As far as I can see, they're all in it for the money. It's time they closed the place down and threw them all out!

[RW] My husband would never speak about the conflict, or about jail, in the house. I have six sons, and it was never spoken about in the house. He never talked to them about doing time, or told them that they should be joining this or doing that.... There's fathers who tell their sons to do what they did, but he would never do that. And not one of them did get involved. There's no reason now. To me years ago the kids were used, they were manipulated.

[RD] I never had any sectarianism in my house. Anything my dad said was always about the system, never about ordinary Protestants. He said there should be no difference between us all. But a few years ago I wanted to join the police, this was when politics were progressing and Sinn Féin were supporting the idea of Catholics joining the police. But my daddy said: "Over my dead body!" Although it was something I would have liked to do, to be honest this community where we live is still not ready for someone to take a step like that.

[RW] I hate to sound pessimistic, but I can't see any real progress being made here. There is too much baggage, it will take years for trust to come about. For no matter what people at a community level do, the politicians are going to dictate. And you will always get the diehards, on either side. I can't see a real future for this country. Look at what happened the other day: Jesus Christ, that man, stripped, his hands tied behind his back and then shot in the head! That's taking us back thirty years! And the car bomb in Newry. How can we go forward with people like that around? I think it's the way people are brought up. If these people are being brought up to 'hate this or hate that' by their parents they too will only have hate. And if you are brought up to hate, there will always be losers, there can never be any winners.

[RD] When I was at school, my own thinking was in line with my daddy's thinking. Often he would have sat and told me about the way the Catholic people were treated years ago. I would have taken all this in and accepted it. But as I got older I began to feel that things were changing. I started to form my own political views and quite often he and I wouldn't see eye to eye. But – and I hate to admit this – after I finished my education and began to work alongside Protestants for the first time, I was surprised to find that some of them were still bitter, and more sectarian than I had expected. For example, I worked in a school in a Protestant area and I don't think the school realised, when they first employed me, where I was from. A couple of months later my job went out to advertisement, but one of

the staff reassured me: "You'll be fine, you're doing a brilliant job." Now, I had to bring a form of ID with me on the day and the only thing I had was my Irish passport. And I didn't get the job. I recalled my daddy telling me that years ago no Catholic would have got jobs, and I was left asking myself: maybe he's right, maybe it still is like that, maybe many people are still sectarian. Isn't it strange how years ago I would have argued with my dad, telling him to get with the times, that things have changed, and it is only now at the age of 27 that I am starting to question that? You'd think it would be the other way about. My worry is that we have still such a long way to go before we see real change here. But we can only bring about that change by talking to one another – and respecting one another.

A few final thoughts:

[LW] Sometimes the story of the Troubles is a totally male-dominated one. Women played their own role throughout it all, and in many respects had it worse than what the men did, because the women had to cope with everyday life and try to treat everything as normal. Well, it wasn't normal. It's not normal to have to go on a visit to your husband or son in jail. It's not normal to live year after year in the middle of a conflict. And it's a lonely life. There's many a night you're lying in bed and you wonder: is this what's in front of me?

[LW] I think, apart from times when things inside the prison were really bad, that it definitely was harder for the women and the families outside because they had everything to worry about: finances, rearing the kids, trying to keep a roof over their heads.

[LW] From my point of view it's been good to be able to tell a bit of *our* story, because for years the women's side of things has long been forgotten and neglected.

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A process of analysis

(3) Searching for a road map

Compiled by

Michael Hall

ISLAND 109 PAMPHLETS

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The Project wishes to thank all those who participated
in the discussions and interviews from which this publication was compiled
(see page 4 [156] for a list of names)

This is an edited account of the *third* phase of a three-phase initiative.

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Introduction

As the rationale behind this initiative has been more fully described in the two preceding Island Pamphlets (Nos. 107 and 108), it will be just summarised here.

The initiative is loosely based on John W. Burton's approach to conflict resolution: namely, that conflict resolution (as opposed to conflict management, conflict transformation or conflict reduction) requires a process, not of negotiation or compromise, but of *assisted self-analysis*, in which the parties to the conflict are hopefully brought to an understanding that what they are facing is a *shared problem*.

Accordingly, two discussion groups were convened – one representing a range of political and grassroots opinion within the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community, the other representing a similar range within the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community. These two groups were, separately, engaged in a process of analysis, to determine whether, as a result of that analysis, they could begin to view the generations-old Northern Ireland conflict as a '*shared* problem'.

The participants were asked four basic questions: (1)What did they feel lay at the root of the conflict? (2) What were *their* community's core goals and aspirations? (3) Had they considered the possibility that some of the strategies employed to advance those core aspirations might actually serve to undermine them? And finally: (4) Could they envisage sitting down with their opposite numbers (in this case the members of the other discussion group) on the basis that what they were all confronting was, in reality, a 'shared problem'?

The discussions undertaken by the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist [PUL] grouping were summarised in Island Pamphlet No. 107. The discussions undertaken by the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican [CNR] grouping were summarised in Island Pamphlet No. 108.

Both can be downloaded as pdfs from https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/islandpublications

Both groupings were then reconvened – again, separately at first – in preparation for the final stage. This involved engaging them in a new series of discussions centred around a *second* set of questions: (1) Did they believe our conflict could be approached as a 'shared problem'? (2) If so, in what possible ways could they collectively address this problem? (3) Specifically, what could each community do *for the other*, so as to engender movement towards conflict resolution and move the situation towards a 'win/win' outcome? (4) Finally: who was willing to engage in a *joint* discussion?

Perhaps not unexpectedly, the process was at times difficult to keep on track. For a start, it was hard to prevent some of the discussants from reverting back to an *analysis* of the causes of the conflict – something which, they were reminded, had already been undertaken in the previous series of discussions – and focus on *how they might move forward*, and what was required – from both communities – to enable this to happen.

Nevertheless, many positive suggestions did begin to emerge from the discussions. Readers will be left to to judge for themselves, however, whether they feel the overall outcome of the process has been productive and worthwhile.

This third pamphlet is divided into five sections:

(1) An edited summary of the reconvened discussion involving the PUL grouping.
(2) An edited summary of the discussion & interviews involving the CNR grouping.
(3) An edited summary of a *joint* exploration on the theme: 'Where to now?'
(4) A list of suggestions made which might be useful when it comes to setting down what one participant called '*a road map'* to the future.
(5) Overview.

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

The following individuals were involved in the series of discussions and interviews from which the material for all three pamphlets was compiled.

PUL representatives

Dr Ian Adamson
Fraser Agnew
Charlene Anderson
Isaac Andrews
May Blood
Sammy Douglas MLA
David Hagan
Jackie Hewitt
Raymond Laverty
James Magee
David McCrea
Jackie McDonald
Dr Chris McGimpsey
Barney McCaughey
Ian McLaughlin
George Newell
Teena Patrick
Brian Watson

CNR representatives

Tim Attwood
Joe Camplisson
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

Searching for a road map

(1) Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist discussion

• *As one of the participants in the CNR group said, "An end to the conflict is only the beginning; we need to take things to the next stage." So, we are here to explore what that next stage might be.* Can *we approach our conflict as a 'shared problem', and, if so, what can each community do to assist the other to move forward?*

• Move forward? I think you're being very optimistic – for a number of reasons. First of all, how do you begin to move forward when some republicans are openly encouraging a return to violence?† Secondly, the politicians up at Stormont have shown themselves incapable of anything constructive. Thirdly, is it realistic to ask people at the grassroots to work on these issues when the community sector is being decimated? Look how many projects are going to the wall because of lack of funding. And, anyway, have the funders any vision? Take the fact that one of our major funding bodies wouldn't support [*Phase 2 of*] this initiative of yours – because they decided that it didn't represent 'best value'! Are they living in the real world?

• I think too many people are expecting grassroots people to move us all forward. Government has an obligation to do it – after all, that's what we elect them for.

• There's a major issue there, because *our* politicians, honestly, are not interested in the loyalist community, whereas Sinn Féin will pursue everything for their people. The unionist parties ignore our needs, whereas Sinn Féin are totally behind their people, will support them, will support inquiries, help them get funding. My issue with the Stormont House Agreement was that there was nobody in there negotiating on behalf of working-class Protestants. And until that changes, until there is people from this community involved in any talks about our future, we're stuck.

• *How could you change that then?*

• The only way is if somebody steps forward, someone who we can all support, someone from a community background, somebody who is for community regeneration, education, whatever... someone we can all trust. Until our politicians get a bloody nose they will always be where they are.

† Reference to a leading dissident republican who was arrested because of comments he made during a speech at an Easter commemoration in Belfast.

• I think there is no point waiting for politicians to come knocking on our door. They are not interested, they are all middle class, they don't understand or experience the human impact – which is still being felt because of the loss, because of ex-service personnel still living with the backdraft of the conflict, still looking under their cars for bombs. I think the only way to do that is to get involved in politics from a grassroots level. Hopefully, next year I might stand for the PUP, and it'll be my bugbear to be shouting for inquiries into murders and atrocities during the conflict, no matter who was involved in them, and start a campaign to have more trauma centres, facilities where it doesn't matter who you are coming in through the door to tell your story. The human story is not being fully told. And I'm talking about *both* communities – for loss is loss. Having said that, there *is* a real need to look into atrocities carried out against the Protestant community, because inquiries into murders don't happen in our community – nobody is interested. For me, we can only move forward when there is a proper recognition for *all* victims, and there is some kind of trauma centre where people who have lost family members get the support they deserve.

• Catholic victims are not really served well in all this either. All these 'rights' bodies, supposedly speaking on behalf of Catholic people, are only using them: they're more interested in talking about the evils of the British government, and how *their* community suffered – totally ignoring the fact that the IRA were responsible for the majority of victims during the Troubles.†

• The nationalist side talk about 'moving forward' but yet they go back to the Famine. They make it appear that England was only ever bad news for Irish people; they totally ignore the many tens of thousands of Irish people who made a good life in England. *Our* politicians harp on about the flag and royalty, and the Shinners go back to the 'Black and Tans' and the Famine – and all this gets us absolutely nowhere.

• The other problem we have is that loyalist communities are suppressed now, let's not hedge about the thing. I know it is happening in nationalist areas as well, with the dissidents. Loyalist areas are still oppressed by our own people. There are criminal gangs here and drug gangs there: it's not about loyalism any more – it's about gangsters. I am forty years in the organisation and I know what I see around me. When you get people knocking on your door and asking: "Can you help me? My granny has to [help me] pay £500 to a drug dealer...." We have *that* to try and

† Of the 3,700 deaths attributed to The Troubles, republicans were responsible for approximately 60% , loyalists 30%, and the security forces 10%. It is estimated that 107,000 people suffered some physical injury. On the basis of data gathered by the NI Statistics and Research Agency, the Victims Commission estimate that the conflict resulted in 500,000 'victims' – victims being defined as those directly affected by bereavement, physical injury or trauma.

clear up first before we talk about housing, equal rights, and a lot of other issues.

• There is such a sense of hopelessness, of alienation, within the Protestant community that I really fear for the future. Young people especially are totally pessimistic about their community's future, about their *own* future.

• *But how do you feel all that could be counteracted?*

• For a start it needs unionist politicians to sit down with community workers, and be open and honest – for once in their lives – and say: how can we work with each other, regardless of what went on in the past? Is there a way forward in which we can fight for people's needs together?

• I can accept everything that people are saying here but I'd like to maybe approach it from a different angle. I used to be involved in helping people make changes *within* organisations. And a lot of it was about having a vision of the future: if we got what we all wanted, what would it look like, could we describe it? And if that's where we want to get to, what are the first few steps to take us there? What could we do to make a start, to build up confidence and trust, to enable us to slowly move forward? Rather than having a big master plan – Stormont House Agreement, or whatever – with everything worked out. That doesn't work for us obviously. Now, after reading both [the preceding] pamphlets, it seemed to me there *was* some common ground: basically it's about our children and grandchildren living in some form of decent society where everyone is treated with respect. Could the two groups begin to build up that picture, their vision of the future?

• Three or four years ago things looked more positive and people felt there were things we *could* work on. Michael, you yourself had us in this very room with people from *An Eochair* and *Teach na Faílte*, and we were talking about the need for people from both communities to stand up and talk about regeneration, better education, our common needs; even somebody who would stand for election who we could all vote for on working-class issues. And the nationalist ones said straightaway: yes, that would be great, but Sinn Féin would wreck it within their communities. As soon as they got wind of anything like that they would jump in to undermine it, demonise everyone involved, and claim that they were 'anti-peace process'. If they couldn't control it they would seek to destroy it. You have that guy Gerry Carroll, standing as 'People before Profits' – he done particularly well at the council election – but already republicans are demonising that young lad something shocking. And Nelson McCausland added his own demonising in his blog, labelling him a Trotskyite. And the people who are doing all this – demonising those who stand up for both communities – *are those in government.* It is government which is antagonistic to anyone coming forward who they see as a threat. So we can talk all we want

about trying to build relationships at a grassroots level – indeed, we are probably steps ahead of most of the ones up at Stormont – but unless the political parties change their attitude towards new grassroots voices then we may forget about it, for the only thing they are interested in – all of them – is holding on to power.

• I am leading the drive for Integrated Education but we are constantly blocked. Not by ordinary people, some 80% of whom support it, but by the 'ones on the hill'.

• Politicians don't want integrated education: they're trying to promote 'shared education', but that is just another form of religious apartheid.

• A lot of people who support integrated education were actually involved in the conflict, but they now send their children to integrated schools. But that is never picked up on by the media. Anyway, the media twist things. A poll was done in Highfield a few years ago about integration and 80% of the people said that they were happy where they were living. And when the media and some academics got hold of that they put it out that these people were sectarian! They weren't – they knew their next door-neighbours, they knew where the local shops were, they were just content living where they were. But academics used the statistics to say: here is an estate that is totally sectarian and doesn't want to move forward!

• This demonising is actually preventing people getting involved. Let's be honest, paramilitary organisations did a lot of damage to communities, and many members of loyalist organisations are now wanting to give something back to their communities, but every time one of them steps forward they are demonised by the media, by Sinn Féin, by our politicians, even by people within their own community. It's becoming harder and harder to get guys to engage; they say, "Why should I do this, I'll end up having my face in the Sunday papers." On the nationalist side it just does not happen. They're allowed to have their past. In fact, they were 'heroes', they 'fought the war', and they will get all the support they need. And what must happen in *our* communities is that former combatants must be allowed to move forward.

• To my mind, the one pretty-well agreed sentiment in recent discussions is not wanting to see a return to the pain and suffering of the Troubles. Everyone wants future generations to grow up enjoying a peaceful and flourishing society. I wonder would it be possible to leave questions of Britishness and Irishness, and associated constitutional arrangements, to one side for the present and take this opportunity to build this fair and flourishing society? Could we focus on improving the quality of people's everyday lives? Maybe if we could do that, and build trust in one another, then other, contentious issues might be easier to deal with. For a start I think we should invest heavily in Early Years provision, for a child's experiences in the first few years of life have a huge influence on

their subsequent life story. Similarly with education. Our present system imposes a sort of religious apartheid on young people growing up, a division that persists into many aspects of adult life. Indeed, is it possible for a society that maintains such divisions to *ever* become fair and flourishing? I doubt it.

• I don't think it would be easy to just set aside identity-related issues. In hardline loyalist areas all I am hearing is: we feel left behind, we are losing our Britishness, losing our identity. And the Shinners know fine well that that is getting on our goat. Glengormley has a parade next Wednesday night and at the minute the Shinners have put in against it. All those things are happening. Michael asked how we might move forward, how we might change things. I honestly don't know. Change can't mean one identity being left behind.

• See your question about us having a 'shared problem'? Our community fears for its culture and identity. But Sinn Féin is driving that fear – they are instrumental in *sustaining* the problem. They repeatedly call for 'reconciliation' and Declan Kearney talks about 'uncomfortable conversations', but Sinn Féin *don't offer anything purposeful* into that conversation except high-sounding platitudes. They're not giving anything away – so it's a one-sided conversation. And as D___ has just said, there's yet another parade they're coming out in protest against. If they *really* want to see change, they would need to look at *themselves* and ask how *they* need to change as part of it all. There needs to be an 'uncomfortable conversation' *internally* within the republican movement, about their role in all of this.

• 'Shared problem?' There was too much emphasis from the very start on 'cross-community'. Now, I have been very heavily involved in cross-community work for years. But there was far too much funding directed that way, with often nothing purposeful coming out of it. A lot of young people were taken away on trips, but there were no issues dealt with. As soon as they were dropped home again they went straight back to the interface causing more trouble. I believe a lot of the funding should have been put into building relationships *within* communities, to *prepare* them for a purposeful cross-community engagement.

• We brought together a group of Protestant kids to explore their history: we gave them talks on Ulster history, Irish history, the Somme; we even took them to Dublin. I went to Newtownabbey councillors looking for more funding. Oh no, they said, we can't support that, you will have to work with a similar group from the Catholic side before you can get funding! Funders devalue 'single identity' work.

• Do any politicians ever get asked: how many cross-community meetings have *you* attended recently?

• Another thing: somewhere along the line there is going to have to be a new relationship with the media and the press. Over the Easter weekend you had a very, very small incident which took place at St Matthews Chapel; it was a *non*-incident. By Monday morning it was on every radio programme, in every paper. Now, that *same* weekend we had republicans in paramilitary dress and balaclavas, we had them walking the streets with weapons, we had a leading dissident encouraging people to join the IRA and go back to armed conflict – yet there wasn't one thing of that the press run with. There is definitely an agenda. If a loyalist mural goes up in Carrickfergus or East Belfast, it will be on the news for three weeks. Yet when republicans put a mural up in Ardoyne – of the guy with the rocker launcher who tried to murder police officers in Twaddell Avenue three months back – it wasn't even on the news! There is definitely an agenda by the media to demonise our community.

• *But, to return to our purpose here: what could you do about all that?*

• Whenever you respond to any request to go on the media they want you to be arguing about Catholics or this or that. That's no use. We want to talk about our communities, and how we can go forward, but they're not interested in that. Even when you try to talk about social issues you know they're just waiting to say: "Well, what about the paramilitaries in your area, are they not doing this and that...?" They continually try to get away from the subject you want to talk about – the bread and butter issues, housing, social problems – because they have no interest in all that.

• There was a big change happened on this road, regarding the Workman Avenue gate, and it involved quite a lot of work. We took the militarised gate down and replaced it with a community gate. We asked the DoJ [Dept. of Justice]: "What media have you got planned for this?" And they said, "Nothing, there is an election on; the politicians would be too busy." And I said, "But this isn't about politicians, this is about residents." Such a big change and it wasn't deemed worthy of any media coverage. But see the first brick that comes over it, there'll be media crawling all over the place.

• *Can I throw in another question here: one put to me by a member of the CNR discussion group. He acknowledged that nationalists/republicans need to be asked where Protestants and unionists fit in with their vision of a new Ireland. But he also wanted a similar question to be asked of you: 'Where do Catholics and their cultural expression fit in with the unionist/loyalist vision of the future?'*

• At the present moment there is equal recognition of both traditions, that is the fundamental plank of the Assembly: equal recognition. We keep hearing about a shared future. Ten years ago you wouldn't have seen anybody walking around Belfast in a GAA shirt, but now it's acceptable. They even walk through Sandy Row and nobody blinks an eyelid. There's people walking up through

Andersonstown wearing Linfield tops. That wasn't possible a few years ago. There *is* a change of attitude slowly coming in. It just hasn't impacted on everything.

• Nationalists have their representation in government, in the legal system, and in everything else. Personally I don't see their quibbles about where 'we' see their role in Northern Ireland: they are fully part of the government at Stormont – what more of an acceptance could there be? A more pertinent question is: where do they see *me* as an Ulsterman? I have no problem with Irish culture, but do they respect *my* culture?

• I am happy in my own identity and am not looking to be offended. And that's the difference. Some nationalists are actually *looking* to be offended.

• It has got to the stage where many Protestants don't even look forward to the Twelfth. I would just love to enjoy myself on the Twelfth. I haven't had a drink on the Eleventh or Twelfth night in over fifteen years, because I'm standing at interfaces until three or four in the morning working with people, trying to keep things calm. But if you're standing near the parade on the Twelfth republicans will take a photo of you and post it on social media, and say, "Look at that loyalist standing there." They don't see, or care about, all the other work you might have been doing to keep the peace.

• Some years ago I was asked where I stood on an all-Ireland, and I said: "I am a democrat, and if the people of Northern Ireland vote for an all-Ireland I will accept that vote – but I will still wake up the next morning as a Protestant." And I don't think Protestants say that often enough; it's as if we are scared to say that we're Protestants and nobody can ever take that away from us.

• I agree. There are Catholics live next door to me, and there are several others in the street. Do they feel their identity is challenged or in jeopardy because they live in a community that is mainly Protestant? No, they don't; they still practise their faith, they still go and visit their friends on the other side of the peacewall. In fact, I would drive them to the Novena. Am I afraid of their religion? No, I'm not. If there was a United Ireland tomorrow, would I be afraid of that? No, I don't think I would. Because it is not going to change me as a person; it's not going to change where I worship, it's not going to change my family, because I will still be doing the things that I do. So no, I wouldn't have any fear of it either.

• But we need to sit down and have that discussion within our communities. Because it's the fear factor which is unsettling people.

• I *would* fear a United Ireland. The political establishment in the Republic turned a blind eye to republican terrorism in Northern Ireland, they gave shelter to murderers, they protected them. And it was *only* since Sinn Féin began to gain

increasing support down south that the politicians there are now demonising them! Now, don't get me wrong: I have great friends down South, and go down regularly – and my ancestry not only includes Catholics but people from the South – but the fact is that I do not trust the political establishment down there. Nor for that matter do I trust the British government. They have a policy of sanitising republicanism and demonising loyalism. The media hone in on every fault that loyalism shows, and totally ignores the faults being shown by republicanism. Tony Blair, the prime minister – gangster and war criminal – ignored the judiciary, ignored parliamentary procedure, ignored everything, and he himself – 'King Blair' – started to hand out Royal Pardons which even the royals knew nothing about, and 'on-the-run' letters and all the rest of it.

• But the South don't want the North. We go down regularly and have discussions, and there is no way people there want a United Ireland.

• A united Ireland is a complete non-starter. I agree with others – a united Ireland doesn't scare me, but it is still a primary concern within our communities. We have kids growing up now who feel their role will be to resist a united Ireland.

• It depends on which kids you are talking to. There is a new generation of young people working alongside Catholics and the discussion has changed. If you're talking to kids who are on flag protests or on parades, then, yes, that is the discussion you're having: "There will never be a united Ireland; I wouldn't even talk to a Catholic!" But if you are talking to kids who are given the opportunity to mix with Catholics – and I'm not talking about middle-class kids, I'm talking about kids from Ballysillan, Woodvale, Shankill – they are saying: things need to change here, would a united Ireland be really that different for me? They don't think it would be.

• Our politicians should tell people the benefits of being in the United Kingdom. It's more than a flag, it's more than the National Anthem, it's more than the Royal Family – there are real benefits to belonging to the United Kingdom. When you put those benefits to people I am convinced there will never be a united Ireland.

• *What type of steps could both communities take to move us all forward?*

• Regarding your question about accepting one another's cultural traditions: Now, a band forum in Londonderry took the opportunity, rightly or wrongly, to make a presentation at the recent Sinn Féin Ard Fheis. They thought it was the right thing to do, and Sinn Féin were putting out the hand of friendship to them. Two weeks later the Sinn Féin Minister for Culture withdrew all their funding!

• We have an important election coming up, and Sinn Féin might become the largest group in the Assembly. If we think things are difficult now, what's it going to be like if that happens?

• You can only work with someone who is a willing partner. Realistically, you are asking people to work with people who don't even want you, who don't even recognise your country!

• There is no middle ground. People still vote on the 'Orange and Green' card.

• Fifteen years ago David Ervine and Dawn Purvis did a great educational document, and the PUP put it out. And what did the DUP do? They rubbished it, because they saw the PUP successfully confronting a cross-community issue. Five years ago that same document came back up and it was the best thing since sliced bread.

• They done the same with the *Common Sense* document when it came out. They ignored it – and yet much of *it* surfaced again in the Good Friday Agreement.

• Mainstream unionists never wanted to see people in working-class communities – like the PUP, or the UDP under McMichael – getting into politics; they think that's *their* preserve. And we're never going to get anywhere while that mentality remains.

• Maybe that is something that we could *all* agree on where it needs to change. Two years ago when the Equality Commission and other quangos were being set up, we had a meeting with the politicians up at Stormont and said there is an opportunity here to get community people from our areas, who have good practice and have been involved for years, onto these bodies. They agreed with us. But did it happen? No, of course it didn't.

• Twenty years ago they agreed to a Civic Forum and where is it?

• People concentrate a lot on the young, and certainly that's where a lot of the work needs to be done. But the conversation also needs to involve the adults. See the people of Cherryvalley and the Malone Road – many of them were more sectarian than people in our areas were during the conflict. They might not have been so vocal about it but believe you me they were. And somebody needs to tackle this LAD [loyalistsagainstdemocracy] social media stuff. It is absolutely disgraceful to poke fun continuously at the educational under-achievement within the unionist working-class community, absolutely disgraceful. And it is being run by people from within the universities.

• When I look at the political parties I always ask myself: are they actually committed to change? Are they committed to working together? I don't think they are. And if that desire to work together is not there, then unless we change Stormont we're stuck, we're going to be here for another thirty years. Stormont is completely wrong. It was set up on an Orange and Green basis, and unless that changes we're stuck.

(2) Catholic/Nationalist/Republican discussion

(incorporating some individual interviews)

• *I am putting the same questions to both groupings: Can we approach our conflict as a 'shared problem'? If so, what can each community do to assist the other to move forward? And what might the next stage be?*

• I'll tell you what both sides could do for starters – more specifically, what the political parties could do: admit to what has been agreed in the Good Friday Agreement. All parties in Stormont have agreed that there will be no constitutional change here unless a majority votes for it. They should now get on with proper politics until that happens. The Good Friday Agreement is *seventeen years old* and we don't seem any closer to confronting our fundamental divisions. There's no coming together of minds, no preparedness to set aside old antagonisms. In many ways we are all still fighting the Troubles – but without the violence. Both sides have to develop a new realism. The irony is that despite professing to be staunch exponents of Britishness or Irishness, both sides are out of step with the massive changes which have taken place in those identities.

• Would the South really want a disaffected minority, nursing their grievances for decades as happened in the North? Anyway, sometimes I think a United Ireland among Catholics is like Heaven: everybody wants to go there, but not just yet.

• The PUL community talk about the working class being badly affected by the cuts and this new rampant capitalism, and then they turn around and say: what's wrong with us is that we haven't got a single Unionist voice. And one unified voice for unionism leads to the presumption that nationalists too should have one unified voice. And if that's the case then we should just forget about politics and count how many Protestants and Catholics are on each side. Indeed, that's what's happening.†

• Take the flag issue... I think Protestants/unionists fail to understand the mindset of nationalists. As a child the only dealings I had with the City Hall was going down to pay the gas bill. And it was completely alien to me and everybody from my community. All the monuments, all the statues, were seen as symbols of victories over our community: the victory of Britishness over Irishness, of Protestantism over Catholicism. We felt cowed down by the system and its

† When contesting the UK General Election (2015) the DUP and the UUP entered into a 'Unionist pact' which some denounced as a 'sectarian headcount'. Then Sinn Féin's Gerry Kelly produced an election leaflet directly appealing to the Catholic vote, by focusing on the fact that Catholics, according to the 2011 Census, now outnumbered Protestants in North Belfast.

symbols. The City Hall had nothing to do with us. The people in the dole office treated us shabbily. I think the Protestant/unionist community assumed that before the Troubles we had bought into all that, but we hadn't, we still felt completely alienated. I mean, Queen Victoria seemed to be everywhere: her statue was prominent in the City Hall grounds, there was another statue outside the Royal [Victoria Hospital]... we noticed all these things even as children. In fact, even though the Royal was right in our midst we never thought it was 'our' hospital – it was 'their' hospital but we used it. And that takes a lot to get over. So minor things like changing rules on flags and other things shouldn't make Unionists fear. If anything, they should welcome it. They shouldn't see it as a sign that Catholics are trying to take over and supplant Britishness with Irishness, but that Catholics are finally being made more comfortable here.

• But moving towards one another doesn't suit the politicians. The politicians would then have to start thinking about *normal* politics. For even within parties you would have left and right divisions over economic issues and other matters – so best to avoid these things, and focus on the sectarian divide, it's so much easier.

• I think that at the beginning of the Troubles the republican leadership and the activists thought they were fighting for a United Ireland whereas the majority of the nationalist population were fighting for political equality. And a lot of Catholics/nationalists are satisfied now with what they have.

• There is all this talk about a 'peace dividend'. All I expected from peace was peace – I don't know what people expected beyond that. Capitalism will create jobs if it needs to create jobs – capitalism *won't* create jobs out of some sense of altruism, as a reward for working-class people because they have now stopped fighting one another. To me, peace should have allowed us to get into proper politics which would *then* have allowed us to fight politically for a better society for working-class people.

• Protestants and loyalists need to come to people in the Catholic community and tell them what their fears are, face to face. We need somewhere to debate and address our fears, as well as work for our children's future.

• I know how hard it is for people to change from things they have been brought up in. My own family have been involved in the IRA since it was formed, and have been in jail in every generation since then. I often asked myself how did we [the Official IRA] cut sectarianism completely out of our organisation. I realised that we were able to replace a narrow nationalism with socialism, which we believed to be a far superior concept. So, you can't just stop people thinking a certain way, they need to be offered *something better*. We need to have a *vision* of what would be best for people, something they could give loyalty to. And, in our own case, it might not require absolute loyalty to the governing system but to *society itself*.

• There should be an open-door meeting place, an *active citizenship forum*, where people could debate and discuss, and indeed, be *invited* in to engage with others.

• I think we should dive in at the deep end – no more pussy-footing about. For example, Michael, I was impressed by the pamphlet you did on Protestant bands, and what I would suggest would be to bring two bands together – one from each community – in a joint project. Get them talking about their role in their communities; share the history of their respective bands; talk about their instruments, the music they like best. And if they were up for it, they could maybe perform together. Things like that might help to break down the barriers that exist, the misperceptions we have of one another.

• Protestants/unionists/loyalists proclaim that they would 'die' for their heritage: and to most of them that is represented by four things: the Union, the Queen, the flag, and their Britishness. But what if the future brings drastic changes? Say Scotland breaks up the Union. That in turn would mean the end of the present Union flag, and would undoubtedly impact on the very nature of 'Britishness'. And say a mood of republicanism was to sweep England and end the monarchy – what would Northern Irish Protestants do? Commit mass suicide? Hardly. They might be shocked and dismayed, but they will do what everyone else would do – they will adapt and get on with their lives. And they will feel themselves to be *every bit the same people* as they were the day before such cataclysmic events. Do you think that the vast majority of people down South are going about bemoaning the loss of the Six-Counties, acting as if they have lost a limb? Not a bit of it! They just get on with their lives. In fact, most of them now would have no real desire to see that severed limb reconnected: it would cause too much trouble, it could infect the main body, best leave it as it is. People adapt. And unionists and loyalists will have to adapt to whatever the future holds, just as nationalists and republicans will have to adapt.

• I remember being at a community event and during lunch I was seated beside a well-known loyalist. And for twenty minutes he gave me his analysis of what Sinn Féin was doing to his community. Finally, I said to him: "You know, I just wish you people could direct the *same* energy and effort – which you have so effectively put into your analysis of what Sinn Féin are doing – into analysing *how we could all move forward*." Both sides constantly say why things *can't* be done – I just wish that people would start telling us what *can* be done, and *when* they will start to do it.

• You hear all this fine-sounding rhetoric – from all sides – about 'the need for reconciliation'. But what we need is *a road map*, describing a *process* of engagement which might take us towards reconciliation. And there will be no point to it all if unionists *or* nationalists go into such an engagement simply with the intention of 'besting' the other side, convinced of the righteousness of their own cause. Both sides need to engage with one another in a spirit of compromise, of appreciation for one another's aspirations, and with a willingness to meet each other half-way.

• I worry that so much grassroots experience is being lost. Community workers today don't realise what was done in the seventies and eighties – all the radical ideas which we once tried to translate into action: food co-ops, a people's bank, moves towards creating a form of grassroots participatory democracy.... Do you remember, Michael, you did a series of pamphlets some years ago in which you let a dozen community activists recount their experiences? I can recall the younger workers in our project reading them in amazement: one of them said to me, "I never knew all that stuff went on." It's as if we have to keep reinventing the wheel; all the accumulated grassroots experience is being lost, and there is little there to help motivate people on the ground, overcome current feelings of powerlessness. I think we need to remind people about that story, tell them that things *can* be achieved.

• Many people, loyalists and other republicans, continually criticise Sinn Féin. But Sinn Féin has moved further than all the other parties to the conflict – and has brought most of its membership with it. The mainstream Unionist parties have been afraid to do that; they have still to confront the nay-sayers within Unionism. And Sinn Féin constantly holds out the hand of friendship to the Protestant community. Unionists and loyalists repeatedly paint Sinn Féin's stance on marches and the Union flag as being motivated by a desire to undermine their identity. It has nothing to do with that, it is motivated by the need to see the nationalist community treated with respect and their culture accorded equality.

• Loyalists claim that it is only *their* community which is demonised by the media. But just look at the invective that has been directed against Gerry Adams in recent years – it is relentless; the media and politicians – north and south – never miss an opportunity to take a swipe at him. The media down south especially constantly try to put it about that he is a liability to Sinn Féin. Absolute rubbish! Gerry Adams is Sinn Féin's leader because Sinn Féin party members *want* him to be their leader.

• We need to expose our young people to all sorts of arguments, different opinions. For example, there's a crowd of young lads who stand across the road opposite our office. How do we impact on *them*? They smoke dope every day, because they have nothing else to do. When you're talking to them, they're saying: "Nobody gives a fuck about us. We've no community centre: the 'RA' blew it up and then they built a memorial garden in its place." Beechmount Leisure Centre too went to the wall, and the Catholic church only opens its youth club one night a week, but you'll not get in unless you're one of the 'good' kids. And they stand there at that shop, maybe twenty/thirty strong every Friday night. Individually, when you are talking to them they are all good kids, but they have fuck all of a future. Those lads look up to the big drug dealers with their fancy cars and big houses in Carryduff. I warned them that once you go down the criminal path, you get in deeper and deeper, and the harder it is to break away. I told them to watch that RTÉ drama series *Love/Hate*, for it portrayed the ruthless side of drug dealing. I try to warn those young lads that even if they only do one criminal act and end up with a criminal record, that's their future job prospects gone. And no-one wants to know them. When taxi-drivers pass them they comment: "Look at those wasters!" And that crowd of young people are replicated right across this city, in every area. But what is everyone's attention focused on? Flags and parades! It's crazy!

• You're asking us whether we could see things as a 'shared problem'? I'll tell you who has *no trouble whatsoever* seeing things from a 'shared' perspective – criminals. There is no sectarianism in crime. There's criminals from the Shankill who work with criminals from the Falls; they always did. They do robberies in one area and pass the stuff to the 'other side' to sell it. They all met each other in Millisle, Rathgael, Hydebank, Crumlin Road and Magilligan. They were doubled up in cells together. They have no politics – money is their only God.

• I have sat down with loyalists who told me how much they distrusted the Orange Order and Unionist politicians, and yet the next minute you see them standing side by side with them! I will respect people who are what they are, and are consistent in what they say and do, whether I agree with them or not. The only answer is for people in working-class areas – whether the Shankill, Rathcoole, the Falls or Andytown – to have a socialist alternative. We have to overcome that old nationalism, whether Irish nationalism or British nationalism. To be honest, I would do away with both the Tricolour and Union Jack – my flag is the red flag, the flag of the working class.

• I feel really despondent when I think about the future. And although I despair about *both* communities, my greatest disappointment is with the Protestant community. I mean – as one of the participants in your PUL pamphlet pointed out – these are the people whose forefathers were to the forefront of the American Revolution; who produced such remarkable individuals as Henry Joy and Mary Ann McCracken. The radical Presbyterians who did so much to ensure the survival of Irish music and the Irish language. And not forgetting, of course, the United Irishmen. I always believed that the Protestant community was capable of so much more. But they seem now to be a people so inward-looking, so burdened with their current problems, that they can't rise above it all – all that former creativity is long gone. And they are continually looking for some saviour, some great leader. To be honest, I despair at the dearth of any real vision in *either* community.

• I think *both* communities have to confront their sectarianism, their self-righteousness. Whenever I hear Catholics condemning Protestants for acting 'superior' or 'supremacist' I am reminded of an old Dave Allen joke: This Protestant dies and goes to Heaven. He is welcomed at the Pearly Gates by an angel, who offers to show him around. The angel points to different groups of people relaxing around a large green. "Just in front of you," says the angel, "are the Presbyterians. Over to your right are the Methodists. And just beside those trees are the Anglicans." But while the angel is explaining all this, the newcomer's attention is fixed on a massive, twelve-foot-high wall just beside them. "What on earth is that for!" he exclaims. "Quiet! Keep your voice down!" whispers the angel. "Why?" "Because behind that wall are the Catholics – and they think they're the only ones here."

• I think we *can* see our conflict as a 'shared problem', and I think it *is* possible to help one another move forward. In our organisation we have done something similar to the process you are currently involved in. For example, we undertook an extensive consultation on parading. We did a stakeholder analysis, looked at 'where we are now', at 'where we want to be', and then developed a 'pathway to actions'. This process helps identify all of the problems, where possible provide solutions, and then moves on to the implementation of these solutions, one at a time. We broke each problem down. For example, with regard to one particular parade, we analysed all of the communication difficulties which existed between the parties involved. To combat some of these difficulties we had written agreements between the police, republicans and loyalists. And we asked observers to report if these were breached. After the third year we didn't

need written agreements because trust had been built up as participants kept to their word. So it was about taking the whole thing apart into its different components and trying to deal with *each* through an action plan.

We have to get people beyond this constant complaining – and it happens on both sides – about how they have been victimised. We all have to live in the *now,* and say to one another: "Right, what are we going to do to make relationships better?" And in *our* work the questions we pose are no different from yours, Michael, in that we say to the nationalist groups: what can *you* do to improve relationships with the unionist community, and we say to the unionist groups: what can *you* do to improve relationships with the nationalist community? Now, invariably both sides will say: "What do you mean, what could *we* do? Sure, *they're* the problem." And we say: "No, no: what can *you* do?" And that can be the beginning of some genuine soul-searching. In conflict we are all often very good at saying what the other side should do, but not what we ourselves should do to improve any given situation.

In saying all that, the community sector *has* delivered. For example, in the late nineties there were problems with communication, and misunderstandings on the ground, so mobile phone networks were set up. When young people were causing problems at the interfaces, many community groups involved them in diversionary activities. And take the very difficult issue of policing... Many groups have been involved in commendable work around the whole issue of policing. Our own organisation in 2006-2009 delivered somewhere in the region of fifteen trust-building processes, and action plans for each district command unit, involving the PSNI, republicans and loyalists. I believe that that process fundamentally changed the relationship between the nationalist community and the police.

Now, how might such an approach impact on the impasse at Twaddell? It is evident that Twaddell is a very difficult and complex situation. Perhaps one possible way to assist would be to get a group of key players from both the nationalist side and the unionist side, and put them – to begin with – in two separate rooms, and then try to help each group identify what *they* could do to improve relationships. Now, no doubt they would each go through the usual, "Well, they [the Orangemen] just need to leave us alone," or "They [the protesters] just need to let us up the road." But you say to them, "No, that's what *they* should do – what should *you* do?" And it might take a long time but you have to persist, and, who knows, if people *did* rise to that challenge, you could maybe see new possibilities being opened up.

(3) A joint discussion: 'Where to now?'

(The final session involved participants drawn from both the PUL and CNR discussion groups.)

• *The purpose of this meeting is to ask ourselves: where, if anywhere, can we go now?*

• You've posed a difficult question. With regard to *my* community, loyalism is going from one crisis to the next. I mean, how is loyalism going to deal with republicans celebrating the Easter Rising next year, especially if there is a massive parade to the City Hall with Tricolours everywhere? Imagine how loyalism is going to be affected by that, especially when 390 'on-the-run' letters were given to republicans to keep them out of jail while loyalists are being threatened with new supergrass trials. Republicans are getting a bye-ball, but loyalists are to be hammered – that seems to be the reality. If loyalist leaders are arrested there will be mayhem. So how can we be positive about the future when these things are hanging over our heads?

• Matters are also complicated big time by the failure to renew funding to many ex-prisoner-run projects. The funding for the 'Prison to Peace' initiative at least gave us the opportunity to do things together. Now that's been taken away.

• From the republican perspective I would echo that concern. With the demise of that initiative people will drift apart and begin to think less of what they heard at those meetings and more about what they're hearing in their own areas. And our interaction was very powerful at times. At the very beginning when you went to a meeting you could feel the tension in the room, but as the discussions progressed many of those tensions were resolved. I think it will be highly detrimental if that opportunity to engage with one another is lost, especially if a crisis does arise in the next year or so.

• I agree. We started off as strangers. It was an uncomfortable zone for many people, but we eventually began to appreciate each other. People can huddle together in their own wee groups and get worked up about what they perceive the 'other' community is doing to 'their' community. But when you sit down *together* you begin to see how contentious issues are seen by the other community, how *they* view it. People are locked into a siege mentality. That's why we have to continue to talk to one another, stop the dehumanising we all did of the 'other side', and try to move on together.

• In 'Prison to Peace' we were getting people to meet and understand one another. We were going into schools and youth clubs and talking to people. S___ was in Taughmonagh Social Club giving a talk on the Connaught Rangers, and what pleased me was that this mate of mine – who once told me that his mother and father "brought me up to hate Fenians, so I just hate them!" – was away over to S___ afterwards, talking about the similarities and the way things used to be. So it *does* work. But if we're not speaking together God knows what will happen.

• In the 'Prison to Peace', it wasn't just the meetings: each group had an office and someone on the end of a phone who could facilitate things. At our office on the Falls Road loyalists could walk in and out unannounced. But it's closed now, so that's gone.

• *Can that conversation not still take place without funding? What about a monthly get-together, to debate different issues?*

• Look, whenever the five groups [representing UDA, UVF, PIRA, OIRA and INLA ex-prisoners] got together at the start, government would have sent helicopters and limousines just to get us into the same room, but when they thought the war was definitely over they wouldn't have given us our bus-fare. And that's where it's at: the job's done, the war's over, we don't need you lot any more. Sixty-three people who were employed through 'Prison to Peace' are now having to look for other work. One of my colleagues has done more cross-community work than anybody I know. But he's now completely out of the equation: last week he was cleaning fridges in Tescos and is starting a new job with Asda. Many people, myself included, who were constantly engaged at cross-community work, are now having to look elsewhere. And it's the same on both sides. You ask could we do it for nothing? Much as I would like to do it, I will no longer be used and abused. Our own community has abused us, saying that we sold out by talking to republicans; our politicians used and abused us for years; and now we are to be abused by the powers-that-be, who see us as surplus to requirements. In fact, I think we're actually needed now more than ever.

• We have all stuck our necks out and taken risks and now they think they don't need us any more. Yet no doubt if things fall apart they'll come running to us pleading: can you help us out here?

• We know that with all the austerity measures and people getting paid off everywhere, and with victims calling – deservedly – for pensions, that it is embarrassing to government to be seen giving money to ex-prisoners. But many of us have moved on: we are no longer simply 'ex-prisoners': we are engaged in community development work, cross-community projects, cultural initiatives. It's the government and politicians who keep us in this box labelled 'ex-prisoners'.

• We accept that we created the atmosphere of violence here, but we also helped create the atmosphere for peace; we gave the politicians room to try to find political solutions, and now they want to marginalise us. That would be acceptable if the politicians were up to the task. But they are clearly not. And if things turn bad, and people at the grassroots have stopped engaging – or the resources to allow them to do so in a purposeful manner are not there – then there could be big problems ahead.

• *But if people at the grassroots stop talking, where else will it take place? As you said, there is no purposeful dialogue taking place between the politicians.*

• They're a laughing stock!

• I personally think Stormont is a beaten docket.

• I watched *Stormont Today* last night and there was a debate on education. But the chamber had less than 20 MLAs present. This was about the *future of our children* and that's all who will bother turning up for such an important debate – out of 108! I think the whole thing is eventually going to collapse under the weight of its own pointlessness; it is completely irrelevant.

• *When what we term the 'peace process' first gained momentum it seemed to be all-embracing and to include the politicians, especially with the euphoria surrounding the 'all-party talks' and finally the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Most people, believing that the 'peace process' and the 'political process' were one and the same, then took a back seat, assuming that the politicians would continue the drive towards peace. But that was a grave misreading of the situation, for the reality is that the 'peace process' and the 'political process' were always two separate entities. And with the grassroots taking a back seat – indeed, being sidelined by the politicians – 'the peace process' lost all its former momentum. We delude ourselves if we believe that the political parties at Stormont are there to further the 'peace' process; they are engaged in a quite separate process of their own, which, in many ways, is actively detrimental to movement towards a genuine peace.*

• That's an interesting analysis. Maybe it's time we made that clear to people: that the political process should no longer be considered as the peace process.

• When the politicians were elected, they said: right, you lot go home, *we* know what has to be done. But they started by focusing on the lowest common denominator – sectarian denominator. On both sides. Some of us started a sort of community forum some years ago but people were saying to us: there's no need for this, the politicians will sort things out, sectarianism will fade away. Sensible people were saying that sectarianism would fade away! We were saying that it wouldn't.

• I think our assorted politicians would be afraid of a community-led forum.

• It's in the nature of all political parties to have that fear. We should be thinking way above such narrow, party interests – we should be open to all views.

• Take your pamphlets: the people I talk to find them invaluable. They had their own narrow perception of the other community and the pamphlets helped them to look beyond that, gave them a new insight. So the more people see stuff like that the better, and the more information we can get out to them... it is all about awareness.

• To me what makes the pamphlets different from other documents is the honesty that comes through from those who participate. That honesty is important.

• I think that part of the problem is the way in which language is used. Unionists look upon language as a science, nationalists seem to look upon it as an art form. I think that is why our politicians are always butting their heads together, because certain words they use have different meanings to either side. However, at *this* sort of level – grassroots discussions – people are using the *same* language, and you don't need a translator – and I think that's the strength of this sort of process.

• *If the talking is not taking place at Stormont, or at the grassroots, my fear is that negative perceptions and attitudes will only rigidify. To return to this idea of a Community Forum: could one not be set up, even without funding?*

• I think there *should* be a community forum; it is the only way forward.

• An old boss of mine used to say: "If it costs nothing, it's worth nothing." We could have all the forums we like, but if the government or the powers-that-be don't have a stake in it then all it amounts to is a talking shop. Now, that in itself might have merit, but as far as the people upstairs are concerned it will probably be seen by them as having no value. They'll not take it seriously.

• If there *was* to be a community forum set up, could I suggest one of the first topics to be addressed? I have said this at previous discussions, but I think people should sit down and determine: what sort of society would we want to see here, in 5, 10, 20 years' time? What would it look like if we did come to an agreement and were able to work together? Could we have a shared education system; shared housing; and our different cultural celebrations being welcomed by *all* communities. Could we do that, could we envisage such a future, and determine what we need to do to get there?

• All of us sitting here know the value of cross-community engagement; we know how important it is. As an example, my own organisation has been working cross-community for years now in Suffolk [estate]. There's a band parade this Saturday and there'll be forty or fifty bands coming up Blacks Road and the Shinners will steward the Woodburn side and we'll steward the estate. And if it wasn't for both sides co-operating that just wouldn't happen. That dialogue started ten years ago.

If we don't have some association with each other, some appreciation of each other, other people will take over, and many of them won't want to talk to anybody.

• I worry about our young people. Firstly, they never directly experienced the terrible impact of violence on individuals, families and communities – unless they lost a family member or have a relative who is still suffering from injuries or trauma – so many of them won't appreciate just how bad it would be to go back to all that. Secondly, many of them have had no real exposure to the 'other' community, or confronted our differences the way we all had to. If you are kept away from the other community, people around you can tell you all sorts of rubbish about them – they're demons, they're devils – and you begin to believe it all.

• Irishness is changing. Britishness is changing. While others are moving forward, people here are stuck in their 1920s-style, out-of-date nationalisms. Especially our politicians. There are far more creative and forward-looking people *outside* politics than inside it.

• It is easy to blame the politicians for our entrenched attitudes. Yet I hear working-class unionists saying to politicians all the time: "We can't get past Ardoyne shops, what are you lot doing about it?" The pressure is coming from the bottom, not just the top. I ran an advice centre on the Shankill for years and no-one ever walked into that office and asked about identity issues, it was all social issues. Yet all our work on socio-economic issues counted for nothing when it came to voting: it followed the same old pattern.

• If the pressure *is* coming from the grassroots, and if the *root cause* of our conflict relates to identity-related fears, then we need to begin to seriously confront those fears. There is a new generation coming up who want to be 'the generation which saves Ulster' – armed with their flags and their carry-outs. We need to convince them that we can best protect our different cultural identities by building a new future together, rather than trying to regain a long-gone past.

• There *are* changes taking place, including down South, as was shown in the marriage referendum. If we *could* facilitate a genuine debate we might be surprised at how willing many people are to move towards an accommodation.

• It will be a hard task. We have been fed negativity for so long it's now ingrained in our perceptions: if the other side is out celebrating then our side has to have a riot; if 'they' are seen to be winning, then 'we' must be losing. It is all opposites. Instead of looking at our commonalities.

• That's why we need to keep engaging with one another, understanding where we have all come from. We need to show people the progress this society *has* made. The other day I saw an old photo of the security barriers in the city centre. We have moved on so far from those days; we can't let it all slide back again.

(4) Ideas for a 'road map'

(The following ideas and suggestions were voiced during the discussions and interviews conducted for all three phases of this initiative.)

From the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community:

- Unionist politicians need to engage with community workers in working-class Protestant communities, to focus on people's everyday needs.
- Grassroots and political representatives from the PUL community should sit down and develop a vision of where they want to be in three or five years' time. In relation to the marching impasse that vision should endeavour to be constructive and imaginative.
- The media and politicians must stop demonising those from a loyalist paramilitary background who want to engage in community work.
- Research should be done by reputable agencies, regarding any perceived imbalances, and if both communities are suffering equally, then this must be clearly highlighted through the media.
- We need to be more creative and challenging. Organise public debates on themes such as: 'Leaving aside flags and symbols, what does Britishness stand for in today's world?'; or 'Do we need so many marches?' Invite Republicans to address themes such as: 'What does Irish Nationalism have to offer people in the 21st century?' or 'Did moving from Civil Rights to Armed Struggle advance or set back the goal of a United Ireland?'
- The Parades Commission should publish the minutes of all meetings to prove that the Orange Order and bandsmen *have* made repeated and genuine attempts to engage with nationalist residents.
- There needs to be more honesty in our dealings with one another (whether at a party political or a grassroots level).
- The PUL community should be open to the reality that the concept of 'Britishness' is changing in today's world and will undoubtedly change further.
- Change cannot mean one identity being left behind.
- The freedom to express and celebrate culture and identity must be protected, for *all* Northern Ireland's communities. We should sit down and debate how our different identities can be celebrated without antagonising the 'other' community.
- We shouldn't exaggerate threats to our cultural expression by a republican minority as reflecting the attitudes of the entire Catholic community.

- While both sides remain fixated by our divisive history we will never move forward. More emphasis could be placed on encouraging a cross-community 'Northern Ireland' identity. Furthermore, there is plenty of (historical and cultural) material which could be utilised to reveal the full extent of our *common* identity. We should take proactive steps towards building that common identity – taking young people on trips to local antiquities, etc.
- The PUL community must stop lamenting. Unionist politicians in particular must cease scare-mongering, and stop perpetuating their 'second-class, losing-out' depiction of the PUL community. These politicians must also develop constructive and creative strategies for protecting, and promoting, the British/Unionist position.
- Unionist leaders should start to present a much broader and more positive picture of British values and the benefits of the Union.
- Unionist politicians should state publicly that the Union is secure, and highlight the positive aspects of the 'peace process'.
- Unionist politicians should cease stoking fears of a United Ireland, given that there is unlikely to be one. They should focus their energies on building a more inclusive society within Northern Ireland.
- We need to get community people involved in all important decision-making committees, quangos, etc.
- Working-class loyalists need to have their voice better represented.
- There needs to be proper recognition for all victims and adequate support made available.
- If Sinn Féin really want to see change, they need to look at themselves and ask how *they* need to change as part of it all.
- Can we work towards a day when we might see people going forward for election on working-class issues? Maybe even with cross-community support?
- Those in government – including the DUP and Sinn Féin – should stop demonising or undermining emergent new voices, even if those voices are critical of them.
- Our politicians should be asked: how many cross-community meetings have *you* attended recently?
- A new relationship needs to be developed with the media; especially given the widespread belief that they have an agenda to demonise the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community.

From the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community:

- An end to the conflict is only the first stage. The next is reconciliation. We have to sit down together and ask: how do we move things forward?
- 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.
- No unionist has ever spelled out to me where *my* community fits into their concept of what *they* would like to see for that future. There has not been that debate. And, likewise, where does someone from the Protestant community fit within *our* 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.
- This nonsense about 'your community is getting more than ours' has to stop – socio-economic disadvantage is the same in *all* working-class areas. We also need to get away from this 'everything you get, we must get' attitude.
- We have to confront the many myths which have built up around Irish history. We also have to be more honest about what went on during the conflict.
- We should welcome challenging debates on all topics. Such as: 'What would a new Ireland look like?' 'Did the use of violence get us any further forward than if we had pursued non-violent alternatives?'
- We need to begin to address difficult, divisive issues. And see what we can do *for one another* so as to enable both communities to move forward.
- Do we all strive for too much 'purity' in our respective ideals and aspirations? Do those aspirations have to be made more relevant to *today's* needs?
- Why is the Catholic community not part of the Twelfth celebrations?
- All political parties should admit to what was agreed in the Good Friday Agreement.
- 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. There will never be a 'Declaration of Intent [to withdraw]' but a [border] referendum is a good substitute. The 1916 Societies initiative 'One Ireland/One Vote' for an Ireland-wide referendum might be used to foster a proper debate.
- Unionists fail to understand the mindset of nationalists. Efforts to achieve 'parity of esteem' should not be seen as threatening by Unionists.

- If Unionists really wanted to secure the Union the greatest opportunity ever is now at their disposal – and that is for them to make the Catholic population feel equal citizens, with their traditions and cultural identity respected.
- The ex-combatant groups who put so much time and energy into securing the ceasefires and consolidating the peace should now ask themselves: 'How can we help to take things to the *next* stage? 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?'
- 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 it has to be a focused-type of conversation that leads somewhere. We have been talking for forty years and yet we have hardly moved on many contentious issues.
- Belfast City councillors only engage with one another across the chamber, and they are usually arguing. There is no interaction outside that, no informal meetings during which ideas and suggestions can be teased out and explored.
- We need a political forum which can provide the opportunity for an ongoing debate, which isn't attached to either identity.
- 'Uncomfortable conversations'? We need more than words, we need to see practical examples of what people will offer to the other tradition.
- Everybody is very good at saying what the other side should do, but not what *they themselves* should do.
- There needs to be a serious effort made over the Ardoyne impasse. People – on either side – should not be using the residents to consolidate their power-bases.
- In your bands pamphlet,† the bandsmen paint a totally different picture of themselves than the one many nationalists see. I think CARA and GARC should give the marchers a chance to prove that they *can* walk past with dignity and showing respect. First of all, bring in a team of independent pollsters to conduct a survey of the people living along the route, asking them (in a confidential questionnaire) questions like: (1) Do you wish to see the march (both outwards and return) take place? (2) If it was to be conducted with dignity and respect, would you give it permission? If 'yes', then also bring in a team of independent monitors to observe the parade(s) and determine whether they felt the marchers did or did not treat the local community with dignity and respect.

† *Towards a shared future (5): Ulster's marching bands*, Island Pamphlet No. 105, available as a (free) pdf download from https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/islandpublications

From both groupings:

- Even though the community sector over many years has developed the skills that are necessary to promote change, the sector is now in retreat and dangerously under-resourced.
- There is no coming-together among our politicians. The DUP and Sinn Féin need to come out publicly and give a commitment to positive change, and an end to 'Orange and Green' politics.
- We all need to be focused on the wellbeing of future generations.
- We need to focus on current socio-economic realities. Also, we must confront the damage being done by criminal and drug gangs.
- The political parties need to convene their own internal discussion groups, with all opinions encouraged. Then do the same on a cross-party basis.
- Can we start to paint a picture of what our future might look like? We need a practical *road map* to the future.
- The root cause of the conflict is sectarianism, and yet little is being done to tackle it in a purposeful way. Indeed, the Assembly itself seems to be a prime example of 'Orange and Green' sectarian politics in action.
- We need a new forum for debate, and preferably a centre where that debate can continuously take place, with an open-door policy.
- There is no real 'peace process'; it is all ad hoc. Community representatives and politicians 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. They should try to agree a workable timetable, with set goals.
- Get the media into a discussion with community activists regarding the media's role and their responsibility in all this; even if it only alerts them to the damage they can cause, it might be worthwhile.
- Community organisations and associations are not optional extras, they are a vital part of community life and must be brought more into the decision-making processes.
- Political parties should be sent this pamphlet and asked to give feedback. Their responses could be published in a follow-up report.

(5) Overview

Although many positive ideas and suggestions emanated from the discussions and interviews conducted throughout the course of this initiative, the overwhelming mood was one of despondency, with no consensus on how to progress our situation.

So where do we go from here? In a separate but related discussion, community development and conflict resolution practitioner Joe Camplisson suggested the re-establishment of a 'Community Development Centre' such as he operated in the early years of the Troubles (see pages 116–119). Although Joe himself is well into retirement age his commitment and passion remain undiminished and I know he would be willing to offer advice regarding the ethos and operating guidelines behind such an initiative. Furthermore, I'm confident that some of those who used to meet and debate in his Centre – from Fr. Des Wilson to Andy Tyrie – would likewise be willing to share their experiences.

On a very similar theme, one of the CNR discussants raised the idea of establishing an ongoing Citizenship Forum where people of all backgrounds could engage one another in debate and dialogue. Would government be willing to fund the administration of such a Forum? Surely it would be to the Stormont Assembly's benefit that important and even contentious issues were being explored and debated by the people most affected by them. The infrastructure is already there: both the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre and Farset International are willing to facilitate the discussions, Farset could host workshops/conferences, and *Island Pamphlets* could take the debate to a wider audience.

The Stormont Executive/Assembly could play a complementary but separate part. The political parties could establish a 'Cross-Party Exploratory Group', where individuals from all parties would come together on a regular basis to debate and explore ideas. (It could be agreed that any ideas expressed would not be binding on their respective parties, and, in return, those individuals would be permitted the freedom to be as imaginative and innovative as they wished.) If any of the emergent ideas contained new possibilities, they could be passed over to the Citizenship Forum to be debated by grassroots activists – as a form of 'testing

the waters' on behalf of the Executive. (A similar cross-party discussion group could also be created within Belfast City Council and elsewhere.)

We need to seriously engage with one another. Both communities also need to move away from seeing 'the other' as a monolithic block; indeed, we need to progress to a situation where labels such as 'PUL' and 'CNR' (such as I myself have used in these pamphlets) become increasingly inappropriate. If we don't debate our way to a new future, the current negative talking which is taking place could so easily take us back, step by step, to the dark days of the past.

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Celebrating a shared heritage

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"Mike, thank you for giving me [this] pamphlet at the book launch a few weeks ago – such a refreshing, lucid, balanced read."

(*e-mail* from historian **Jonathan Bardon**, February 2019)

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Foreword

As I compile this pamphlet Northern Ireland has been without its devolved government for well over a year. The collapse of the power-sharing Executive was initially attributed to anger at a botched heating scheme which threatened to cost the Northern Ireland taxpayer a fortune over many years. However, the centrality of this issue gradually receded and was replaced by a fundamentally more divisive matter: the demand by Sinn Féin for a stand-alone Irish Language Act (Acht na Gaeilge), something which their erstwhile partners in government, the Democratic Unionist Party, refused to contemplate.

And over the past months vexed questions of language, culture, heritage and differing narratives of history have reasserted themselves within Northern Ireland's two main communities, as well as influencing decisions made at the ballot-box.

The legacy of a divided society

Many people within Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities view Irish language demands as the continuation of an ongoing Irish republican assault on their Britishness: a form of 'war by other means'. As evidence, they often point to a Sinn Féin booklet, presented in both English and Irish (*Learning Irish: a Discussion and Information Booklet / Ag Foghlaim na Gaeilge: Leabhrán Eolais agus Díospóireachta*) in which Máirtín Ó Muilleoir had written: "It is our contention that each individual who masters the learning of the Irish language has made an important personal contribution towards the reconquest of Ireland.... Tiocfaidh ár Lá." In the booklet, prominence is given to a lecture by Sinn Féin Cultural Officer Pádraig Ó Maolchraoibhe, during which he said:

> [E]very phrase you learn is a bullet in a freedom struggle.... Make no mistake about it, either you speak Irish or you speak English. Every minute you are speaking English you are contributing to the sum total of English culture/language in this island. Every moment you speak Irish you are contributing to something that is distinctly ours. There is no in between.... The process of decolonization will have stopped half-way if, the day we succeed in driving the English from our shores, what is left behind is an Irish people possessed of the language, culture and values of the English.

A unionist participant in a Farset Think Tank discussion group listed a catalogue of concerns:

> It's all a drip, drip process. Queen's University no longer plays the National Anthem on graduation days. The Crown's coat of arms has been removed from most courts in Northern Ireland. The Shinners opposed the erection of 'Welcome to Northern Ireland' signs along the border. The list of items which Sinn Féin councillors demanded be removed from Limavady council offices ranged from a 'Charles and Di' commemorative mug to a statue of local Orangeman William Massey. In Newry they voted to name a children's play-park after Raymond McCreesh, whose gun was linked to the Kingsmill massacre. Then the removal of the Union flag from Belfast City Hall. They want symbols of Britishness out and symbols of present-day Irish nationalism in. They even refuse to accept that Londonderry is part of the United Kingdom.[1]

Not surprisingly, most nationalists see matters differently. As one republican participant in a separate Think Tank discussion said:

> I think Protestants/unionists fail to understand the mindset of nationalists. As a child the only dealings I had with the City Hall was going down to pay the gas bill. And it was completely alien to me and everybody from my community. All the monuments, all the statues, were seen as symbols of victories over our community: the victory of Britishness over Irishness, of Protestantism over Catholicism. We felt cowed by the system and its symbols. The City Hall had nothing to do with us. The people in the dole office treated us shabbily. I think the Protestant/unionist community assumed that before the Troubles we had bought into all that, but we hadn't, we still felt completely alienated. I mean, Queen Victoria seemed to be everywhere: her statue was prominent in the City Hall grounds, there was another statue outside the Royal [Victoria Hospital]... we noticed all these things even as children. In fact, even though the Royal was right in our midst we never thought it was 'our' hospital – it was 'their' hospital but we used it. And that takes a lot to get over. So things like

1 A reference to Derry/Londonderry's bid to be 'UK City of Culture' in 2013. The Sinn Féin party leader on Derry city council, Maeve McLaughlin, said: "While we are a city of culture there has to be a recognition that we're not part of the UK.... [There are] tens of thousands of nationalists and republicans in this city and region who do not recognise themselves as part of the UK."

changing rules on flags and other things shouldn't make unionists fear. If anything, they should welcome it. They shouldn't see it as a sign that Catholics are trying to take over and supplant Britishness with Irishness, but that Catholics are finally being made more comfortable here.

Another nationalist commented more recently:

To be honest, I never cared all that much about an Irish Language Act – I felt that it would be too expensive, using money better spent on our health service. But I experienced real anger at Gregory Campbell's efforts to deride the Irish language with his 'curry my yogurt' comments.[2] I just felt that here again was a backwoods Unionist deliberately belittling my community and my heritage. I have talked to many Catholics and nationalists and it is clear that Arlene Foster's stupid 'crocodile' analogy,[3] coupled with Paul Givan's mean-spirited denial of funding to children wanting to learn Irish,[4] were prime motivating factors in getting nationalists out to vote for Sinn Féin.[5]

Is this clash of cultures inevitable?

In the aftermath of the Belfast Agreement and the setting-up of the Stormont Assembly a mood of optimism *had* seemed to envelop Northern Ireland's estranged communities. It also seemed that deep-seated tribal identities were slowly breaking down. In the 2011 Census the number of people here who declared their identity as 'Northern Irish' – as opposed to 'British' or 'Irish'– was 20%; rising to 29% in the Omagh area. Yet polls taken in the aftermath of the 'flag protests'[6] revealed that the number of Catholics who now identified themselves

2 In the Northern Ireland Assembly the Irish sentence *go raibh maith agat, Ceann Comhairle* ('thank you') used by nationalist MLAs was parodied by the DUP's Gregory Campbell, when he said "curry my yoghurt can coca coalyer". He was barred for a day for failing to apologise.

3 DUP Leader, Arlene Foster, with reference to demands from Sinn Féin, said: "If you feed a crocodile it will keep coming back for more."

4 DUP Minister Paul Givan sparked anger among nationalists when he decided to end a bursary scheme which provided small grants for people from disadvantaged backgrounds who wanted to learn Irish. In the face of a widespread backlash he later reversed his decision.

5 In a snap Assembly election (March 2017) an extremely high turnout saw Unionist parties lose their overall majority In Stormont for the first time. Sinn Féin were the biggest winners, coming just one seat behind the DUP.

6 On 3 December 2012 Belfast City Council voted on a Sinn Féin/SDLP proposal that the Union flag, which had been flown every day on the City Hall, should not be flown at all. The Alliance Party's compromise was carried: that the flag should be flown on 18 designated days. The decision led to widespread street protests, some of which involved inter-communal violence.

as 'Northern Irish' *had dropped dramatically*. That was proof, if proof was needed, that if the 'defence' of a particular identity is pursued in a negative, exclusivist manner, it can actually undermine the very thing it is trying to protect.

A number of media commentators had actually voiced surprise that more than 20% of the population of Northern Ireland had indicated that they identified themselves as 'Northern Irish only' rather than 'British' or 'Irish'. But is this *really* so surprising? And is there any basis for it in our history?

This pamphlet comprises a number of essays, written over recent years, which I hope will help to convince the reader that our two communities are not the two distinct and separate peoples they are often assumed to be.

Michael Hall

1: 'Britishness' and 'Irishness' – a challenge

[This document was written in 1995 at the request of the Shankill Think Tank]

Irreconcilable identities?

It is often claimed that the inter-communal conflict in Northern Ireland is unsolvable, because its roots lie in the collision between two irreconcilable national identities. However, this follows as much because of the exclusive manner in which those two identities are invariably expressed: to be Irish one cannot seemingly be British, to be British one cannot be Irish. There also abound gross misunderstandings as to what each identity entails. Gerry Adams, in his book *Free Ireland: Towards a Lasting Peace*, wrote that "The loyalists have a desperate identity crisis. They agonise over whether they are Ulster-Scotch, Picts, English or British."[1] Now, I have never met *any* Ulster loyalists who had ever agonised over whether they were 'English'. Such a misconception might be expected from a badly-informed foreign journalist, but not from a major player in the politics of the past twenty-five years, and is a reflection of the many misconceptions held *by each community* about the other.

Just as questionable is the attempt to deny that the other community's identity is valid. To quote again from Adams: "There are no cultural or national links between the loyalists and the British, no matter how much the loyalists scream about their 'British way of life'." Not only is this comment quite inaccurate, but even a brief overview of different facets of our shared history can reveal the extent of the 'cultural and national' links which have existed, not only between "the loyalists and the British", but between *all* the inhabitants of Ireland and those on the British mainland.

A common inheritance

- Identical Stone Age burial monuments exist in the northern half of Ireland and south-west Scotland, of which Séan O Ríordain commented: "The tombs and the finds from them form a continuous province *joined rather than divided* by the narrow waters of the North Channel."[2] [*Italics added*] Archaeologists have labelled these tombs the 'Clyde-Carlingford cairns' to signify the close relationship between the two regions.
- Not only was the North Channel between Scotland and Ulster a constant point of contact between the two islands, but the entire Irish Sea is seen by

some scholars as providing for more complex patterns of social interaction than first believed. As archaeologist John Waddell suggested: "Perhaps we have greatly underestimated the extent to which this body of water linked the two islands in prehistoric times.... Maybe we should consider the Irish Sea as a "great land-locked lake", to use Dillon and Chadwick's phrase."[3]

- The prehistoric link between the two islands also suggests a shared kinship. As Irish historian Liam de Paor commented: "The gene pool of the Irish... is probably very closely related to the gene pools of highland Britain.... so far as the physical make-up of the Irish goes... they share their origins with their fellows in the neighbouring parts of the next-door island of Great Britain."[4]
- It was settlers from the north of Ireland, labelled 'Scotti' by the Romans, who bequeathed the name 'Scotland' to their new homeland.
- From the 5th to the 8th centuries the Ulster-Scottish kingdom of Dalriada encompassed territory on both sides of the North Channel. From Dalriada emerged the kings who united Scots and Picts in what became Scotland.
- The Gaelic language was brought from Ireland by such settlers and it eventually spread throughout Scotland, a prime example of the close interrelationship between the two islands. In more recent times the influence has been in the opposite direction and much of the distinctive vocabulary of the North of Ireland is of Scots origin, including words such as *skunder* (sicken), *thole* (endure), *byre, corn, dander* (stroll), *lift* (steal) and *mind* (remember).
- St. Patrick was an immigrant from Britain whose influence on Irish history and culture has been profound.
- When St. Columba sailed from Ulster to Iona, the monastery he founded there proved of vital importance to the religious and cultural history of Scotland. As the Dutch geographer Heslinga wrote, it was settlers from Ulster who "gave Scotland her name, her first kings, her Gaelic language and her faith."[5]
- The cross-fertilisation between east Ulster and northern Britain gave rise to what Proinsias Mac Cana described as a "North Channel culture-province within which obtained a free currency of ideas, literary, intellectual and artistic."[6] It was this artistic environment – centered in the scriptoria of the more progressive monasteries – which directly led, according to Mac Cana, to east Ulster becoming "the cradle of written Irish literature".

- One of the products of that creativity – the *Táin*, or 'Cattle Raid of Cooley' – is the *oldest* story, written in a vernacular language, in western European literature.
- Some of the ancient annals of early Irish history concern themselves as much with events in Scotland as with those in Ireland.
- Even in the great Irish sagas major characters such as Cúchulainn and Deirdre regularly commute between Ireland and mainland Britain.
- At the Battle of Moira in 637, reputedly the greatest battle ever fought in Ireland, the over-king of Ulster, Congal Cláen, had in his army – according to Colgan – contingents of Picts (Scottish), Anglo-Saxons (English) and Britons (Welsh).
- In 1316, at the request of Ireland's Gaelic chiefs, Edward Bruce of Scotland was proclaimed King of Ireland.
- Between the 13th and 16th centuries the importation by the Irish chieftains of large numbers of Scots mercenaries (the gallowglass) – many of whom settled in Ireland – was to prove vital to the resurgence of Gaelic Ireland.
- The Plantation is the best-known period of major population movement between Britain and Ireland, but it was not the first such movement, nor was it the last – those of Irish descent have made a significant contribution to the present population of Great Britain.
- Rather than the modern Irish Republic being the embodiment of traditional Gaelic aspirations, "the concept and the institutions of the modern nation-state were, ironically, imported from England."[7]
- Irish Republicanism owes much to the radical ideals of Scottish Presbyterianism.
- Despite the conflict which has perennially soured Irish-British relationships, Irishmen have long maintained links with the British Army, epitomised at Waterloo where it is estimated half the British Army were Irishmen. This close connection was also evidenced in the First World War, during which some 50,000 Irishmen died fighting in the British Army. And in the Second World War 80,000 Southern Irishmen volunteered to join the British forces.
- Irish writers of English descent (the Anglo-Irish), alongside those of native Irish descent writing in English, have established one of the most vibrant branches of English literature (with a roll-call of names that includes

Spenser, Congreve, Goldsmith, Swift, Sheridan, Wilde, Yeats, Synge, Shaw, O'Casey, Beckett and Heaney). As Robert McCrum noted:

> In a remarkable way the Irish have made English their own, and have preserved qualities of speech and writing that many Standard English speakers feel they have lost.... In the fusion of the two traditions, Anglo-Saxon and Celtic, it is sometimes said that Irish Gaelic was the loser. The language was certainly transmuted into English, but it found, in another language, ways of expressing the cultural nuances of Irish society, of making English in its own image.[8]

- The history of the Labour movement has also linked the working-class peoples of the two islands, as did some of its most prominent leaders: such as Larkin, who was born in Liverpool, and Connolly, who was born in Edinburgh. During the 1913 Dublin lock-out, for example, English workers organised food-ships to help ameliorate the suffering of their Irish comrades.

This list could easily be extended, but it should be sufficient to refute the assertion that "Protestants need to be encouraged to recognise that the common history they share with their Catholic fellow countrymen and women in the common territory of Ireland is *quite foreign to any British experience*."[1] [*italics added*] On the contrary, both Irish Protestants *and* Irish Catholics have a history which is not 'foreign' to the historical and cultural experience of Britain, but an integral part of it. An honest recognition of this need not threaten either Britishness or Irishness, but enrich both, and serve to promote a more inclusive identity. Gusty Spence made such a point when a loyalist delegation visited the USA:

> We were addressing this gathering of people with Irish 'connections' and when I told them I was proud to be British but also proud to be Irish, one man remarked, in an irritated tone, "Why is it that you loyalists can't make up your minds what you are!" I asked him: "I take it you are American, sir?" "How perceptive," was the gruff response. "I take it you are also proud of your Irish roots?" "I am indeed," was the more cautious reply. "Then if *you* can be proud of your 'Irish-American' heritage, are we not entitled to be proud of *our* dual heritage?" The man nodded and sat down.

Our mixed background

There are many in Northern Ireland today who still cling to the notion that each

community has somehow managed to emerge from centuries of history relatively free from any 'contamination' by the other. By claiming their 'own' music, their 'own' sports, their 'own' language, and sustaining a host of other more subtle 'differences', they imagine that the two communities have managed to remain two distinct and separate tribes. The reality of our history tells quite a different story.

The document ended with the following challenge from the Shankill Think Tank:

We challenge Ulster Loyalists to redefine their Unionism. Instead of remaining trapped by exclusivist definitions they should have the confidence to celebrate their link with the peoples of Britain in a way that transcends religious or cultural differences within Northern Ireland. We challenge them to develop a Unionism which is truly inclusive of *all* sections of our people.

We challenge Irish Republicans to redefine their Nationalism. Instead of remaining trapped in exclusivist definitions they should have the confidence to celebrate *all* the facets that make up this island's heritage and not suggest that some are 'alien' and hence inferior. Their Nationalism must become truly inclusive. No longer must they assert that a sizeable section of the people living in Ireland can only be considered Irish once they relinquish their Britishness.

Furthermore, we challenge both Loyalists and Republicans to acknowledge that over the centuries each community has imbued many of the other's attributes, to the extent that the heritage of both traditions has increasingly become a shared one. We challenge Loyalists to acknowledge the Irish component of their heritage, and Republicans to acknowledge the British component of theirs.

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2: Is there a 'Northern Irish' identity?

A shared inheritance

The communal divisions (cultural/religious/political) which exist in Northern Ireland today are assumed to date back to the collision between 'Planter' and 'Gael', compounded because Planters and Gaels are deemed to have been two quite distinct and separate peoples, with little in common except their shared animosity. However, anyone who has gazed seawards from one of the headlands along the Antrim or North Down coasts and realised just how close Scotland is must surely have doubted that the first substantial contact between the peoples on either side of the North Channel could have occurred only four hundred years ago during the Plantation. And indeed, when we investigate the connection between the two areas more deeply, we discover just how close and ancient it actually is. As Irish historian Liam de Paor noted:

> The gene pool of the Irish... is probably very closely related to the gene pools of highland Britain.... Within that fringe area, relationships, both cultural and genetic, almost certainly go back to a much more distant time than that uncertain period when Celtic languages and customs came to dominate both Great Britain and Ireland. Therefore, so far as the physical make-up of the Irish goes... they share these origins with their fellows in the neighbouring parts – the north and west – of the next-door island of Great Britain.[1]

Indeed, an extensive DNA study by Bryan Sykes concluded that 'there is a very close genetic affinity between Scotland and Ireland.'[2] [discussed further on page 208]

However, even if it was to be conceded that the Scottish arrivals might have had some distant kinship with the Irish among whom they were being planted, it is widely presumed that the two peoples now developed separately – an Irish version of apartheid. Yet, contrary to such a belief, the Planters did not drive the native Irish off the planted territories *en masse*. While the Gaelic landlords and their followers were certainly dispossessed, it is now realised that the entire pre-plantation population was not. Historian A T Q Stewart pointed out:

> Neither the undertakers nor the London companies found it expedient or possible to clear all the native Irish from their lands, and therefore

> they accepted them as tenants, violating their contracts with the Crown in order to do so. Without the Irish tenants it is doubtful whether the Scots and English planters could have made such limited progress as they had by 1641. The great concealed factor in this whole 'British' plantation is the part played by the relatively undisturbed Irish population in building the towns, fortified bawns and planter castles, and in developing the resources of forests, rivers and loughs... When we remember that the servitors and Irish grantees were actually permitted to take Irish tenants, it becomes clear beyond doubt that a very substantial proportion of the original population was not disturbed at all. Modern historical research on the plantation has thrown much light on this continuity of population.[3]

With the two communities living in close proximity, interaction inevitably resulted. Estyn Evans pointed out that "There was much more intermarriage, with or without the benefit of the clergy, than the conventional histories make allowance for."[4] There is abundant evidence of people changing their religion, with many planters becoming Catholic and many native Irish becoming Protestant. The process of interaction still continues – many people in Northern Ireland today have 'mixed' marriages in their family trees. Even surnames do not guarantee a means of surmising someone's background, a point Ulick O'Connor made in relation to IRA hunger-striker Bobby Sands:

> It is ironic that he, who more than anyone else by his devotion to the Irish language while in Long Kesh helped to contribute to the present renaissance of the language in West Belfast, should not have a Gaelic name. (I once published a list of eleven names that could well have been those of a Protestant hockey team of boys and girls from a posh Belfast school. It was, in fact, compiled from a list of members of the Provisional IRA who had been killed in action.) You can see the influence of this mixed background in Bobby Sands' writing – Scots dialogue here and there; 'the sleekit old Brit' for instance.[5]

Is there a Northern Irish Identity?

Even if the reader accepts – grudgingly or otherwise – that the present-day descendants of the Planters and Gaels *might* have a more common ancestry than is popularly believed, how does that relate to a specifically *Northern Irish identity*?

The reality is that throughout its history Ulster and its people have exhibited

a distinctive identity.† Now, a distinctive identity does not necessarily imply a *separate* identity: the Ulster people have too many long-standing ties with the people in the rest of Ireland and mainland Britain to allow for that. So let us take a look at this Ulster identity – without those who identify with either a United Ireland or the Union with Britain feeling that it threatens their deeply-held aspirations. Indeed, *both* aspirations can only be strengthened by a deeper understanding of what the people of Northern Ireland share in common.

P L Henry described the difference between Ulster and the rest of Ireland as "one of the most deeply-rooted, ancient, and – from a literary point of view – most productive facts of early Irish history."[6] And Estyn Evans wrote: "The two communities in the north, however deeply divided by religion, share an outlook on life which is different from that prevailing in the south and which bears the stamp of a common heritage."[4] Even the arrival of the Celts, as Evans suggested, "reinforced an older and persistent regional distinction... Gaelic culture as a whole, like the Gaelic language, seems to have taken shape by being poured into an Irish mould, a mould having varied regional designs."

Ulster's chieftains certainly considered their territory to be the true bastion of Gaelic Ireland. No-one epitomised this better than Owen Roe O'Neill, who was as staunch an Ulsterman as any present-day Northern loyalist. Owen spent more than half of his life in exile on the Continent, and whilst there he and his fellow Ulstermen associated so much together that other Irish leaders sarcastically labelled them the 'northern clique'. When he returned to play a prominent part in the 1641 rebellion he was met by constant suspicion and intrigue from the Southerners, and formed his own 'Catholic Army of Ulster'. As Jerrold Casway noted: "Rather than accept assistance from Owen O'Neill and the Ulster Irish, many Anglo-Irishmen preferred the Leinster forces... Owen and his northern army, they asserted, should remain in the north where they belonged."[7] Rinuccini, the Papal Nuncio, ascribed this animosity to "no other ends than the bad feeling which is cherished towards the men of Ulster". However, it was Owen's Catholic Army of Ulster which fought the greatest battle of the war at Benburb, the high point of the Gaelic struggle. Before the battle Owen exhorted his men with a 'Caesar-like oration', in which he told them: "You are the flower of Ulster, descended from as ancient and honourable a stock of people as any in Europe."

† Many readers will undoubtedly point out that 'Northern Ireland' and 'Ulster' are not coterminous. But even in Donegal some years ago local newspapers were complaining that Donegal was the 'forgotten county' of Ireland, and many people there felt a deep estrangement from Dublin.

Before the rebellion collapsed, the Gaelic rebels, in one of those twists of history, for a moment found themselves in alliance with Protestant parliamentary forces against the Crown. Derry was surrounded by royalists and its commander, Sir Charles Coote, appealed to Owen for assistance. Owen's Army of Ulster marched to relieve the city.

> The relief of Londonderry created a momentary atmosphere of satisfaction and celebration unique to Ulster. Owen and Sir Charles met for the first time. The native Irish Catholic general and the commander of the leading Protestant-planter stronghold in Derry toasted each other within the walls of that city. Coote paid Owen O'Neill many compliments and in his letter to the English Council of State spoke of his respect for the Ulster leader.[7]

However, one cannot deny that today's reality is that community perceptions in Northern Ireland are not founded on commonality, but on deep divisions. The Troubles were, in large part, the result of one community feeling forcibly separated from their southern co-religionists and the other community feeling under siege by those who threatened to separate *them* from their British heritage. Ironically, the violence which ensued only increased the impression of regional difference – when viewed from *outside* by those to whom the two communities afforded such undying loyalty. In 1978 writer Dervla Murphy remarked that, "In Ireland, during recent years, many Southerners have been voicing anti-Northern sentiments with increasing vehemence and frequency."[8] Why should that be so? Because the unrelenting violence, which was barbaric rather than romantic, had appalled the vast majority of people in the rest of the island. As Bowyer Bell wrote (in 1993):

> The Republic wanted no part of the Troubles, no part of Northern Ireland in whatever guise... Dublin gradually accepted that Ireland was not only a divided island but also a divided society and to incorporate the latter into the former was beyond power and desire. As the Orangemen said, six into twenty-six won't go; nor, felt Dublin, should it... The majority still wanted unity but without cost and without complication. Most feared violence and the six counties were violent... For Dublin the dream now is that the North could stay silent in the margins as it did for so long – unknown, mysterious, unredeemed, and forgotten but on patriot holidays. Now the prospect of the Black North as a Green province appals all but the few faithful republicans and the romantics.[9]

On the British mainland, a distancing process had also been under way – assuming that many there cared much for this 'other part' of the United Kingdom in the first place. The Northern Irish, then, as much because of the bitterness of their quarrel, had been steadily losing friends. How much this has been rectified in recent years by the 'peace process' remains unclear.

However, the violence, while engendering an ever-deepening polarisation, had, at the same time, made both communities much more aware of each other's hopes and fears, and, for those with humane sensitivities, brought an acknowledgment, mostly unspoken but nevertheless real, of the pain and suffering they had been visiting upon one another. As Dervla Murphy noted:

> More than ten years ago M W Heslinga discerned within both Northern tribes 'a sense of regional fellowship, a sense of difference from Southerners, that mixture of contempt and defensiveness that is typical of the strongly-marked provincial character'. Since then this sense of regional fellowship has been strengthened by the horrors the Northerners have been sharing even while they have been inflicting them on each other's communities.[8]

Ulick O'Connor remarked: "What is important is that there is a growing grassroots acceptance of the idea of a shared community."[10] Such an idea is nothing new. The Siege of Derry centenary commemoration, held on 7 December 1788, showed, as A T Q Stewart 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."[3] 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.

The shared sacrifice made by Protestants and Catholics during the First World War was repeated during the Second World War. Of the 38,000 volunteers from Northern Ireland some 4,500 were killed. The war effort helped forge a new bond between the two communities, as Jonathan Bardon noted:

> Catholics and Protestants alike felt proud when General Eisenhower saluted them from the steps of the City Hall.... In addition, the horrors of the Blitz, by throwing together people from both communities, had reduced sectarian animosity in the city to its lowest level since the founding of Northern Ireland.[11]

The people of Northern Ireland are the product of a shared cultural and historical inheritance, one which has constantly thrown them together just as frequently as it has managed to drive them apart. Certainly a 'British' and an 'Irish' identity both exist – but so too does a 'Northern Irish' identity.

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3: A language smorgasbord

The people of Ireland are renowned for their gift of storytelling, for the lyrical construction of their daily talk, and their unique literary achievement. This fondness for the 'word' is rooted deep within the population. The ancient poets, who preserved the oral traditions of the people, carried considerable status within the community. As Francis Byrne said: "There can be little doubt that the influence which they exerted so effectively for over a thousand years was rooted in ancient belief in the power of the word."[1]

English, Irish and Scottish dialects have all contributed significantly to the multifaceted linguistic heritage of the Ulster people. As Estyn Evans said of the Protestant Northerners: "They've inherited a material culture and an idiom that has the stamp of this country on it. And I like to think of a very paradoxical figure: an Orangeman from the Bannside, waving a British flag and pouring scorn on the Englishman because he can't get his tongue round a good Gaelic place-name like Ahoghill."[2]

English

The varieties of English spoken in Ireland have their origins in the Elizabethan period. This was the most vibrant period of the English language – it encompassed Shakespeare and his contemporaries – and the 'English' that the Irish adopted and adapted still preserves many 17th century peculiarities of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, and is far closer to that rich heritage than the English of modern Britain.[3]

Hiberno-English has both a northern and a southern version, due to the dialect differences in the original Gaelic of the two areas. The pervasive influence of Gaelic upon our pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and idiom is still quite evident in daily speech. "He's in bed with the leg", "he is after writing", "there's a great buying on the cows the day", "it's mad in the head you are", "she has a desperate cold on her": many of these turns of phrase arise from a literal translation of the Gaelic.

Irish/Gaelic

Irish nationalists are well aware and proud of their linguistic inheritance, but many people from a Protestant/Unionist background remain unaware of – or even express antagonism to – their co-equal ownership of that inheritance, let alone

their own community's historical role in preserving and reviving it.

Irish Gaelic was taken to Scotland by Irish settlers and developed into Scots Gaelic, which became widely spoken throughout Scotland. Indeed, one writer remarked that twenty generals speaking little English, from the Scottish Gaeltacht, fought at Waterloo. And, as Padraig Ó Snodaigh noted: "When one examines the origins of the planters one can only conclude that most of the Scottish ones must have come from Gaelic or bilingual areas."[4] Furthermore, as Estyn Evans pointed out: "Paradoxically it is much-planted Ulster that has the highest proportion of Gaelic place-names among the four provinces."[5]

It was said that as "late as 1716 ten per cent of the Presbyterian clergymen in Ulster could speak and preach in Irish."[4]

In the 1780s and 90s it was radical Presbyterians in Belfast who took the initiative in efforts to preserve the Irish language and Irish culture. The United Irishmen's newspaper, the *Northern Star*, produced the first Irish language magazine, *Bolg an tSolair*, in 1795, in order to prevent "the total neglect and to diffuse the beauties of this ancient and much acclaimed language".

The first Belfast Harp Festival was held in 1792 in an effort to "revive and perpetuate the ancient music and poetry of Ireland". The second Harp Festival, held in 1813, was organised by Edward Bunting. Between 1792 and 1807 Bunting had collected melodies from different parts of Ireland and so was prominent in preserving much of Ireland's traditional music.

In 1797 Bunting produced his first volume of traditional melodies from his headquarters – the McCracken household in Rosemary Lane, off High Street, where "in the bosom of rationalist Presbyterian Belfast the Renaissance of Irish music took place, the precursor by a century of the Irish Gaelic revival."[4]

Prominent Orangeman Dr R R Kane, who was an Irish-speaker, is said to have signed the minutes of the Lodge of which he was the Master in Irish.[4]

The first book to be printed in Irish Gaelic was a translation of the Calvinist *Book of Common Order* published in Edinburgh for the use of Presbyterians.

In his Foreword to Padraig Ó Snodaigh's book, *Hidden Ulster: Protestants and the Irish Language*, Cosslett Quin (retired Church of Ireland clergyman who was President of Oireachtas na Gaeilge in 1972 and 1973) wrote:

> Mr. Pádraig Ó Snodaigh... has been digging in our family graveyard, and has disinterred many interesting facts about our ancestors, which it is impossible either to refute or ignore. We are reminded that this Gaelic heritage is one which we share with the psalm-singing Sabbatarian Gael of the Highlands and islands of Scotland, as well

> as with Irish Catholics of Saxon, Welsh and Norman ancestry. ... The Church of Ireland is reminded that three or four centuries ago we produced the first Gaelic Bible in days when the Scottish Gaels were still reading and writing standard literary Irish... We see also that Muiris Ó Droighneáin does not exaggerate when he tells us that: 'It was the Protestants who played the main part in language activities at the beginning of the 19th century' and observes that 'it was a strange, unnatural sight when the Catholics began slowly and shyly to join in the work'. He also points out (see his work on the *History of Modern Irish Literature*) that the Fenians officially – with a few exceptions – not only ignored, but discouraged that work.[4]

Ó Snodaigh quotes Ulster Unionist Belfast city councillor Chris McGimpsey who, in a speech delivered in Kilkenny in 1993, said that his forebears lost "our native tongue" by the beginning of the 19th century, adding that for him his "interest in the language is more that of a homing pigeon returning to the roost than that of an outsider who has discovered something alien which attracts him".[4]

Heinrich Wagner, after spending over twenty years compiling a linguistic atlas of Gaelic dialects, found that "each major dialect ... is dependent on its geographical position... [and the] dialects of the old province of Ulster are almost as close to the dialects of Southern Scotland as they are to other Irish dialects."[6]

The Ulster Gaelic dialect was to decline not only a result of the intrusion of English, but, ironically, as a consequence of the rise of Irish nationalism. The main problem for the early Irish nationalists was that there was no single 'caint na ndoine' – language of the people – to promote as *the* 'Irish Language', but rather an extensive range of local idioms and grammatical forms. However, with the creation of the Irish Republic, de Valera requested that a standardised form of Irish be produced. The outcome was a reformed spelling, and a reformed grammar, which was largely composed of forms selected from Munster and Connaught Gaelic, with many Ulster Gaelic words ignored.[7] †

Ulster-Scots

While numbers of the Scots settlers who came over during the Plantation period

† The situation regarding such neglect seems to be improving. Gordon McCoy (Irish Language Education Officer), commenting on a draft of this pamphlet, informed me that "many resources for primary schools are now produced in dialects, including non-standardised Ulster terms", as it is felt that children "should recognize their own speech in written texts".

spoke Gaelic, others spoke Scots, the language of the Scottish Lowlands and the court language of Scotland. These Ulster-Scots settlers generally adopted the old Gaelic place names in Ulster but they also added new names, including Ulster-Scots landscape descriptions such as brae [hillside or slope], clabber [soft mud], flush [boggy ground], pad [path], knowe [small hill], loanen or loaney [lane].

Indeed, much of the distinctive vocabulary of the North is of Scottish origin, including such words as crib, skunder (sicken), thole (endure), thrawn, byre, corn, dander (stroll), lift (steal), scallion, farl, lug, oster and mind (remember).

The word 'craic' is not in fact Irish, but Ulster-Scots. It first appeared in an Irish language dictionary in 1927 and is derived from the Ulster-Scots word 'crack' (or 'crak') and is also used in Scotland and the north of England.[8]

In the early part of the 17th century much education in Ulster was carried out in Scots. Government officials in Dublin Castle had to employ clerks with knowledge of Scots to handle the correspondence from Ulster.[8]

The Ulster-Scots also expressed their language in a vibrant literary form:

> For over 150 years from 1720 scores of Ulster-Scots folk poets published poetry in their own tongue. Notable among them were men such as Samuel Thomson, the 'Bard of Carngranny' and James Orr, the 'Bard of Ballycarry'. Poems in Scots and Ulster-Scots also appeared regularly in the *Belfast News Letter* and in the *Northern Star*, the newspaper of the United Irishmen. ... Ulster-Scots was once spoken freely throughout Belfast but the use of the language declined in the 19th and 20th centuries.[9]

Looking to the future

There are many official organisations promoting either Irish (Gaeilge) or Ulster-Scots. Dr Ian Adamson OBE promotes the fact that Gaelic and Scots are specific languages, with variants in Scotland and Ireland, and endeavours to support both through the Ullans Academy (Ulster-Scots or Ullans), and the ULTACH Trust (Ulster Gaelic or Gaedhlig).

There are also important community-based initiatives which strive to bring our smorgasbord of language riches to a broader grassroots audience, one of the most significant being Linda Ervine's efforts to promote the Irish language (Gaeilge) within Protestant working-class East Belfast.

Just recently, the *Belfast Telegraph* had an article on young Irish and Ulster-Scots musicians coming together for the first 'Remembering Bunting' festival in

Belfast. The CEOL band is made up of twenty teenagers from Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann branches and members of the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association.

Sean Ó Roideain, from Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, said that a lot of familiar music would have disappeared without Bunting's efforts. He added:

> There are a lot of tunes which have crossed over between the Catholic and Protestant communities, and there are a lot of English and Scottish tunes in Irish traditional music. There are also a lot of Irish tunes in Scottish music. It's a bit of a myth to think of two separately sealed communities as there has always been coming together.[10]

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4: 'The children of a common past'

Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald recently said: "I seek a new and agreed Ireland, in which you can comfortably be Irish or British, or both or neither."

A major problem of our history, however, is that 'Irishness' and 'Britishness' have rarely sat 'comfortably' alongside one another. Those holding fiercely to one identity have more often denigrated the 'other' identity than endeavoured to see its potential richness. Gerry Adams was dismissive of the 'other' community's professed identity when he wrote: "There are no cultural or national links between the loyalists and the British, no matter how much the loyalists scream about their 'British way of life'."[1] Similarly dismissive was the prominent Unionist politician who said he did not consider himself an Irishman because he didn't "jig at the crossroads", while another dismissed Irish as "a leprechaun language".

With regard to 'their British way of life', it is ironic that even many in the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community struggle to define it in any depth. I once asked a community group in Belfast's Shankill Road to describe their sense of Britishness, and the replies centered around 'our flag', the [11th Night] bonfires, Loyal Order marches, and the Royal family. My question "but what else?" met with surprisingly little response. I felt it was ironic, that here, in what was once described as 'the heart of the Empire', no-one could articulate the sense of what their Britishness stood for, in the way that, for example, Nelson Mandela did when recalling his schooldays in Natal:

> Britain is the home of parliamentary democracy.... I was brought up in a British school, and at the time Britain was the home of everything that was best in the world. I have not discarded the influence which Britain and British history and culture exercised on us. [Visiting Britain] had this excitement because I was visiting the country which was my pride.

Or Mahatma Gandhi, when he said in a speech in April 1915:

> I discovered that the British Empire had certain ideals with which I had fallen in love, and one of those ideals is that every subject of the British Empire has the freest scope possible for his energies and efforts and whatever he thinks is due to his conscience. ... I am no lover

> of any government and I [have] said that government is best which governs least, and I have found it is possible for me to be governed least under the British Empire.

The unconcealed hatred that some Irish republicans harbour towards 'the Brits', and the equally denigratory way some Ulster Protestants view many aspects of Irishness, is almost akin to racism. And yet, as I will try to show over the next few paragraphs, any such 'racism' is based on completely false foundations.

Some Irish republicans will go apoplectic at the phrase 'the British Isles', their [mis]understanding being that it stems from the desire of a 'British' (specifically 'English') political entity to claim unwarranted sovereignty over the island of Ireland as well as mainland Britain. But let us look at the origin of the phrase.

Between 330 and 300 BC the Greek geographer and voyager Pytheas sailed past these islands as far as Norway and Iceland, and wrote of his voyage in 'Concerning the Ocean'. In that document he provides us with the earliest historical mention of these islands, calling them *Pretanikai nesoi* (Isles of the Pretani), a name the people used themselves, but the meaning of which will never be known. Pretani is the Irish word for the most ancient inhabitants of these islands to whom a definite name can be given. In Julius Caesar's time 'Pretania' became 'Britannia'.

Hence the *origin* of the term 'the British Isles' comes *not* from any *English* desire for conquest or control – for the political entity called England had still not come into existence – but from the Irish themselves.

(And it is for this reason that Ian Adamson and Helen Brooker, who have formed Pretani Associates, do not talk of a *shared* identity, but of a *common* identity.)

Bryan Sykes, in his book, *Blood of the Isles*[2] ("the very first book to be written about the genetic history of Britain and Ireland using DNA as its main source of information"), noted, with reference to the relationship between the people of Ireland and Scotland (and focusing on DNA inherited through the maternal line):

> [T]here is a very close genetic affinity between Scotland and Ireland.... [We] can confidently conclude that the [two populations] have the same underlying genetic origins.... [This similarity] makes it impossible to detect any genetic effect of the Ulster plantations.

Elsewhere he writes (with regard to 'the genetic bedrock on the maternal side'):

> By about 6,000 years ago, the pattern was set for the rest of the history of the Isles and very little has disturbed it since. ... I see no evidence at

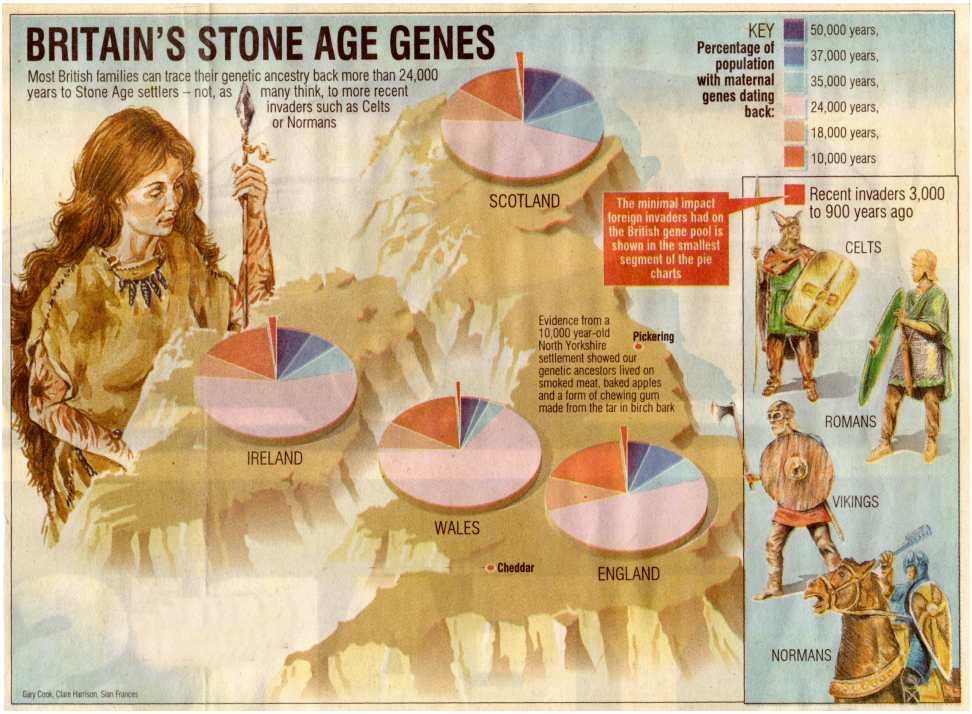
all of a large-scale immigration from central Europe to Ireland and the west of the Isles generally, such as has been used to explain the presence there of the main body of 'Gaels' or 'Celts'. ... The people of the Isles who now feel themselves to be Celts have far deeper roots than that and, as far as I can see, their ancestors have been here for several thousand years.

More importantly for our strife-torn history, he adds:

> However we may feel about ourselves and about each other ... just a little way beneath the surface the strands of ancestry weave us all together as the children of a common past.

I come finally to the graphic below. This graphic accompanied a *Sunday Times* article entitled 'Britons stand united on the DNA map'.[3] Authors Lois Rogers and John Harlow, commenting on the first genetic map of the British Isles, undertaken by Oxford University, noted that whatever the *cultural* difference between the various peoples within the 'British Isles'

> ... in genetic terms at least, there is no difference between us – we are all ancient Britons. Those who claim to be descended from marauding



> bands of Celts or Anglo-Saxons will be disappointed by this research. [For their claim ignores] the much more powerful inheritance of the ancient Britons, whose genes have overwhelmed all subsequent residents of the British Isles.... [T]he little physical differences – the Nordic or Celtic characteristics, such as red hair or green eyes – which suggest the invaders played a small role in our genetic make-up [were] probably transmitted down the male line.

Geneticist Stephen Oppenheimer made the observation that "genes have no bearing on cultural history."[4] As an example he noted that although there is no significant genetic difference between the people of Northern Ireland they have been fighting each other for centuries. He said it would be wonderful if an awareness that the British and the Irish are genetically much alike might improve relations, "but I somehow think it won't". Wouldn't it be good if we could prove him wrong?

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Appendix 1: Ulster's impact abroad

'The Patron saint of Europe'

In AD 555, at Bangor, County Down, St Comgall founded a monastery "which has given the largest number of names to Irish religious history – Columbanus, Gall, Moluag, Maelrubha, Dungal, Malachy, to name but a few." [1] As for St Comgall:

> Such was his reputation for piety and learning that multitudes flocked to his school from the most distant parts; it is well established that not less than 3,000 students and teachers were under his care at one time, including many of the most honourable in the land. The evangelistic zeal of Comgall was pre-eminent – down to the landing-place at the reef of rocks he led many a band of his disciples who were to embark on their frail coracles to spread the Gospel in European countries.[2]

One of these disciples was Columbanus, who in AD 589 set off on a great missionary journey through Europe, eventually dying at Bobbio, Italy. The monasteries he established were the inspiration for hundreds of others. Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister whose energies contributed so much to the setting up of the European Community, said that "St. Columbanus is the patron saint of those who seek to construct a united Europe." Pope Pius XI wrote: "The more light that is shed by scholars in the period known as the Middle Ages the clearer it becomes that it was thanks to the initiative and labours of Columbanus that the rebirth of Christian virtue and civilisation over a great part of Gaul, Germany and Italy took place." The French poet Leon Cathlin concluded: "He is, with Charlemagne, the greatest figure of our Early Middle Ages." [3]

The American Connection

Severe economic pressures, increased rent demands by absentee English landlords, and government discrimination against Presbyterians as well as Catholics led, from 1717 onwards, to a great migration from Ulster to America. By the time America declared for Independence, a quarter of a million Ulster people had emigrated there, and were estimated to have made up 15% of the population. Because of their dual ancestry, these Ulster folk were to become known as the 'Scotch-Irish' (although 'Scots-Irish' is nowadays the preferred spelling). They had a profound impact on their new homeland:

> It can be said that the Scotch-Irish made three contributions to colonial America: they settled the frontier, they founded the Kirk, and they built

> the school. They, more than any other group, created the first western frontier. To the Ulster Scots must largely go the credit of being the first pioneers west of the Appalachians and of opening the Mississippi Valley.... In some frontier regions, notably those of Pennsylvania and the Carolinas, they outnumbered all other stocks combined.[4]

Not only were the emigrants from Ulster predominant among the pioneers – the mother of the first white child born west of the Rockies was Catherine O'Hare from Rathfriland – but they carried with them an important part of their cultural heritage, their music:

> Whatever their influence in terms of cabin and barn styles, field layout, town planning, and so on, it seems likely that the greatest and most lasting contribution of the Scotch-Irish was music. And however one may define their particular religious and ethnic identity, musically they should be considered Ulstermen, for they brought with them the mixture of Scottish and Irish tunes which is still characteristic of large parts of Northern Ireland.[5]

They were hardy, determined people, unwilling to be ordered about by British Crown agents, one of whom, James Logan, complained that "a settlement of five families from the north of Ireland gives me more trouble than fifty of any other people."[4] Their independent streak, and the hatred they had brought with them of aristocratic landlordism, was to make them determined not to be placed at such a political and social disadvantage again. This was to have far-reaching consequences in that the Scotch-Irish were to be foremost in the Revolutionary War against Britain and in the Declaration of Independence. The first armed clash in fact occurred in 1771 when Scotch-Irish settlers fought British forces on the Alamance River in North Carolina. It has also been claimed that in 1775 Ulster settlers at Mecklenburg called a convention and passed Resolutions of Independence, seemingly becoming the first people to advocate publicly this course of action.[6]

In the War of Independence which followed the Scotch-Irish were to play a prominent part. While the majority of settlers were English, and many of them were in a quandary about rebelling against the British Crown, the Ulster settlers had fewer qualms of conscience and were to be enthusiastic supporters of independence. The Crown agents in America were in no doubt anyway; for them "A Presbyterian conspiracy was at the heart of the revolutionary movement. The Presbyterians were plotting independence."[4] Indeed, a Hessian captain [German soldiers who fought alongside the British redcoats] said: "Call this war by whatever name you may, only call it not an American rebellion; it is nothing more

or less than a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian rebellion."

The Scotch-Irish composed the backbone of Washington's Army. The Pennsylvania Line, the famous force of regular troops, was of primarily Ulster descent and Washington said, "If defeated everywhere else I will make my last stand for liberty among the Scotch-Irish of my native Virginia." A Committee of the House of Commons was told that Ulstermen made up half of the rebel army. The Official Declaration of Independence was: written in the handwriting of Charles Thompson from Maghera; printed by John Dunlap from Strabane; given its first public reading by the son of an Ulsterman, Colonel John Nixon; and among the signatories were the following, all either born in Ulster, or born to Ulster parents: John Hancock (President of the Congress), Thomas McKean, Thomas Nelson, Robert Paine, Edward Rutledge, George Taylor, Matthew Thornton, and William Whipple.

The great Seal of the United States – an eagle holding arrows and a branch – was designed by Charles Thompson after a Congressional design committee consisting of Franklin, Jefferson and Adams broke up in disagreement. John Rutledge (brother of Edward) chaired a committee of five states which drew up the U.S. Constitution. According to Alexis de Tocqueville, the U.S. Constitution bore Rutledge's "personal stamp. One man made it; and it was Rutledge."

Ten U.S. Presidents were of Ulster descent: Andrew Jackson, James Knox Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses S. Grant, Chester Alan Arthur, Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley and Woodrow Wilson.

The eighteenth-century migration to America had been largely composed of Presbyterians from Ulster. They were the pioneers and established themselves prominently in all walks of American life. A century later an even larger exodus began from all parts of Ireland, many fleeing from a land devastated by the Great Famine. This great exodus was predominantly Catholic, and these newcomers were to be known in America as 'Irish-Americans', and were to provide part of the labour force which was to transform America into the most powerful industrial nation in the world.

Sources

1. Mary Ryan D'Arcy, *The Saints of Ireland*, The Irish American Cultural Institute, Minnesota, 1974.
2. *The Illustrated Road Book of Ireland*, The Automobile Association, 1970.
3. Ian Adamson, *Bangor–Light of the World*, Pretani Press, Belfast, 1979.
4. *The Ulster-American Connection*, The New University of Ulster, 1981. Contributions by E. Wright and M A Jones.
5. W H A Williams, 'Irish Traditional Music in the United States', *America and Ireland: 1776–1976*, Greenwood Press, USA, 1980.
6. See Wikipedia ('Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence') for a thorough analysis.

Appendix 2:

(taken from Island Pamphlet No. 139, 'Assorted Anecdotes' by Michael Hall)

How grassroots action can transform long-held attitudes

Many citizens of Northern Ireland have long since come to accept that our assorted political leaders, of whatever variety, are not in any urgency to build *genuine* reconciliation between our communities. They may pay lip-service to it, but most of them are still engaged in securing the tribal votes which they have used to sustain their positions for so long. However, at the grassroots, especially within working-class communities, individuals and groups *have* over the years repeatedly sought to build bridges and move this society forward. I once confronted one of our politicians with this fact, and his response was: "Huh! Show me one example where community actions have really transformed attitudes here!" Well, I intend to describe here a prime example of just how grassroots-led initiatives can effect remarkable change.

Farset is an interface project which has been highly innovative in its efforts to promote purposeful community-based initiatives. [*An account of Farset's many projects is more fully described on pages 91–95*.] One of Farset's initiatives was to take our young people – both Protestant and Catholic – away from their home environments via a youth exchange scheme. The first trip, in 1983, was funded by the British Council and as part of the programme the young people were taken to Paris where they visited the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe and other tourist sites. However, on the last day of the trip Farset's manager, Jackie Hewitt, realised that they would arrive at the ferry port far too early, and he asked Farset's secretary, Dr Ian Adamson, for any ideas. Ian suggested that they make a detour to the Ulster Tower at Thiepval, on the Somme battlefield.

[*The Ulster Tower was erected in 1921 by public subscription raised in Northern Ireland in memory of the officers and men of the 36th (Ulster) Division, and all Ulstermen, who died in the Great War. It stands on the site of some of the most desperate fighting which took place during the first day of the Battle of the Somme.*]

The group arrived at the Tower to find it locked up. A notice on the door gave the address of a local woman who would open it for visitors on request. At the

young people's insistence this woman was located and she duly opened the Tower. The interior was full of spiders and cobwebs, dust was lying thick on the floor and dead flies were everywhere. The young people seemed fascinated, and when they also visited a nearby cemetery they were soon engrossed walking around the headstones, identifying the different Irish regiments. It was clear to Jackie and Ian that this part of their visit had meant more to the young people than the tourist sights of Paris.

However, on returning home, nothing more was thought about it – until two of the young girls who had been on the trip came to see Jackie. "Jackie, see that Tower place? Can we not clean it up and get it opened again?"

Jackie was more than willing to agree, with the result that a Farset Somme Project was initiated, which, because its purpose was to refurbish the Tower, open it up to visitors, and reinstate it as a place of remembrance, managed to receive government funding. As the project developed it soon became clear the massive interest which had been generated. Alongside the ongoing renovation of the Tower, an extensive Farset programme now incorporated tours of the Somme area.

To give the young people involved in the Project some awareness of the historical context, Jackie handed me a copy of Cyril Falls' *History of the 36th (Ulster) Division* and asked if I would compile a short booklet from it. Never one to turn down a cross-community opportunity I told Jackie I would, but on the understanding that the booklet would not focus solely on the 36th (Ulster) Division but would be broader in scope. Jackie agreed, but, at a meeting some years later, he commented:

> Michael Hall's booklet *Sacrifice on the Somme*, commissioned by Farset in 1986, greatly helped to influence people to look at this whole part of our shared history in a new way. To be honest, I can remember reading through the draft and feeling extremely uneasy: the contents mentioned not only the 10th and 16th (Irish) Divisions, but James Connolly, the Easter Rising, Partition and the Russian Revolution! At first I thought, as did others, that we wouldn't get away with this. Then we decided: let's put it out and see. And, although there were some negative comments, at a grassroots level the response was largely positive. That booklet, of which 5000 copies were eventually distributed, helped to consolidate Farset's efforts to make the initiative all-inclusive.

The need to make the project all-inclusive stemmed from the fact that across Ireland attitudes to First World War remembrance were deeply divided. To most

Irish Nationalists, whether in the Republic or in Northern Ireland – and especially given that the year of the Battle of the Somme, 1916, was also the year of the Easter Rising – any Great War commemoration was largely viewed as the preserve of the Protestant Unionist population of Northern Ireland. Of course, both sides colluded in this perception. Many Protestant Ulstermen would have been loath to acknowledge the role played by Catholic Irishmen – even Catholic Ulstermen – in the Great War. History in Ireland had become – as it had always been – selective, exclusive and politicised.

In 1987 Farset's 'Somme Tour' broadened out to include sites in Belgium: Messines, Ypres, the Menin Gate and the 16th (Irish) Division memorial at Wyteschaete. That year also saw the start of official ceremonies to which Farset invited dignitaries and local councillors from across Northern Ireland. Then, on 1 July 1989, Farset held an official re-dedication ceremony at the Tower in the presence of Princess Alice, the Duchess of Gloucester.

When the suggestion was made to purchase Thiepval Wood, which had been the 36th Division's base prior to the battle, it required the setting up of a separate company, the Somme Association. In 1994 the Association opened a visitors' centre at Thiepval, and also the Somme Heritage Centre, a registered museum located at Conlig, near Newtownards, County Down. [In 2004, with government assistance, the Association would finally purchase Thiepval Wood.]

With public interest now aroused by the work initiated by Farset, and carried on by the Somme Association, other people began to add to its impact. One important development was when Loyalist community leader Glen Barr – who had been enthused by his participation on a Farset Somme tour – joined with Southern TD Paddy Harte to establish the 'Island of Ireland Peace Park', located at Messines in Belgium, with a replica of an Irish round tower being erected as its central focus.

[*The Battle of Messines took place on 7 June 1917. This was the first completely successful single operation on the British front. But there was another important ingredient to it. As H.E.D. Harris pointed out: "It is also memorable to Irishmen as largely an all-Irish achievement; two of the three divisions in the attacking line were Irish, the 36th on the right and the 16th in the centre of IX Corps, a unique line-up of Irish fighting men, and the largest in modern history."*]

The Peace Park was formally opened on 11 November 1998 by the Irish President Mary McAleese, in the presence of Queen Elizabeth and King Albert of Belgium, the

first time an Irish head of state and a British monarch had participated in a joint ceremony. In her remarks President McAleese said:

> Today's ceremony at the Peace Park was not just another journey down a well-travelled path. For much of the past eighty years the very idea of such a ceremony would probably have been unthinkable. Today we are keenly aware that if we are to build the culture of consensus promised by the Good Friday Agreement then we need to create mutually respectful space for differing traditions, differing loyalties. I do not think that it is too bold to suggest that this day has been a day of historic significance.

The Peace Park was also to impact strongly on 'P.J.' Hallinan from Inishowen, County Donegal. He and others now formed the Inishowen Partnership Friends of Messines, and decided to hold a service of commemoration at Dunree Military Fort for all those from Inishowen who had died in the Great War. As 'P. J.' noted:

> For our first commemoration we had prominent people, including Orangemen, from the Shankill up in Dunree doing their bit for our remembrance service. To me that was extremely significant. Maybe the day will come when we might share our commemorations – even all parade to the Field [on 12 July]. It happened in Belgium, when the AOH [Ancient Order of Hibernians] and the Apprentice Boys of Derry paraded, not in separate groups but mingling through each other, to the round tower. And they came back with ties exchanged; indeed, you wouldn't have known who was an AOH man or an Apprentice Boy. Now, if it happened there, there's no reason why it couldn't eventually happen here. The precedent has been set. It's about breaking down the old myths.

'P.J.' even did the unthinkable: when people from Messines came over to Northern Ireland for a visit, the Irish Tricolour and the Union Jack were paraded *together* around the cenotaph in Derry, the first time this had ever been done.

The Island of Ireland Peace Park had been initiated by 'A Journey of Reconciliation Trust', a broad-based, cross-border body bringing together people of all religious and political aspirations in Ireland. To complement the Peace Park and extend its purpose, an International School for Peace Studies was established in 2000 in Messines, in collaboration with local people. The school began to hold workshops and courses on peace-related themes.

Then in 2002 the Fellowship of Messines Association was formally

constituted, the core of its membership being ex-combatants, both Loyalist and Republican. Not only did the members of this initiative engage together at the School for Peace Studies in Messines, but efforts were made in Northern Ireland itself to change perceptions at a community level. As Loyalist Frankie Gallagher recalled:

> When we replaced a Loyalist paramilitary mural in Tullycarnet [East Belfast] with one depicting the only Northern Ireland recipient of the VC during World War II – James Magennis, a Catholic from the Falls Road – we initially thought we were going to get a lot of criticism and were quite anxious as to what the local response would be. We needn't have worried, because the people of Tullycarnet made it abundantly clear that it was a great thing to recognise someone like that. And when we brought people from the Irish Republic, and representatives of the Dublin Fusiliers and others, up to the unveiling ceremony, I was really pleased at how welcome the residents of Tullycarnet made them feel. I think they saw it as an opportunity to express something positive and non-sectarian about themselves, because they were sick of being stigmatised as bigots, and a lot of people in the Protestant community aren't like that at all.

And when Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern addressed a joint session of the Houses of Parliament in May 2007, he spoke of the World War 1 experience as an example of our "shared journey".

On 7 June 2007 the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Messines was celebrated there, and, as a further sign of changing attitudes, Sinn Féin sent its first official representatives (although individual Sinn Féin members, like Tom Hartley and Alex Maskey, had previously supported Farset's efforts).

I will leave the final word with Jackie Hewitt:

> People forget the painstaking path which had to be trodden to change former perceptions and attitudes. I think that, when you look at all that has been done – from the first Farset involvement, the development of the Somme Association, and right up to what is happening now in Inishowen and out at the Somme and Messines – it was a marvellous feat and one of the most significant elements in the development of a peace process. Because the peace process is not the outcome of a couple of days at Leeds Castle or a couple of days away at a hotel somewhere by a group of

politicians. The peace process is a manifestation of what has gone on in the community over the years, what the community has been saying, what they have been doing, what they're sick of, where they want to get to . . . So all these things contributed to the peace process. And I genuinely believe that what we have all done, through our different projects, has been a valuable part of that.

In Memoriam

Some of the individuals mentioned in this book have since passed away

Anne Gallagher, died 2013
Dr Ian Adamson, died 2019
Fr Desmond Wilson, died 2019
Louis West, died 2020
Joe Camplisson, died 2021
May Blood, died 2022
Jackie Hewitt MBE, died 2024