

Ourselves Alone?

*Voices from the
nationalist working class*

Falls Think Tank

compiled by
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Foreword

Following the *Life on the Interface* conference held in Belfast in August 1992, attended by 60 representatives from community projects on either side of the West Belfast 'interface', the Springfield Inter-Community Development Project decided to initiate Community Think Tanks, to assist people in each community to articulate their fears and aspirations. The Shankill Think Tank was to first to get 'off the ground' and two publications resulting from its deliberations have already made a significant impact upon the ongoing grassroots debate.

This pamphlet now seeks to reflect grassroots feeling within the Catholic/Nationalist working class of Belfast. As was the case with its 'Shankill' counterpart, the use of the word 'Falls' for the discussion group is not an entirely accurate description of those who contributed, for other areas of Belfast were represented. The participants included former prisoners, community activists and young people, reflecting many of the different tendencies which exist within Nationalist/Republican opinion.

The organisers accept that a 'Think Tank' such as this inevitably attracts to itself the more outspoken, 'community activist' type of individual, and this document therefore makes no claim to speak on behalf of an entire community. Nevertheless, because many of these 'activists' have been involved at the grassroots for some considerable time they can provide a unique insight into reality as it is experienced by the Nationalist working class.

Far too often outsiders – politicians, media commentators, policy-makers and a host of others – view whole segments of people – such as 'the Catholic working class' or 'the Protestant working class' – as merely 'categories' around which they make their decisions. If nothing else this document should serve to remind them that such 'categories' are made up of real people, whose present attitudes have been determined by real events and whose hopes, fears and aspirations are not going to be readily put aside either by the machinations of civil servants or by political decisions taken without their consent in the corridors of power.

A Sense of Community

One of the less publicised side-effects of Northern Ireland's recent quarter century of violence has been the detrimental impact it has had upon the strong sense of community which once prevailed in working-class areas of Belfast, Catholic and Protestant alike. This sense of community still exists, of course, but in some areas it has been placed under immense strain, particularly when the effects of the violence were compounded by the dislocation caused by redevelopment. Whether this 'community spirit' will ever regain its former potency is uncertain, yet its existence remains a vibrant part of the community 'memory', especially of that period just before our present 'Troubles' erupted with such devastating consequences.

People helped each other more. Your mother probably borrowed from somebody up the street – sugar, milk, whatever. People weren't afraid to admit they didn't have things, for they were all in the same boat. Now that people are a bit better off they seem to feel "you can't let themuns know you don't have it". The poverty then kept people very close. More often than not the cry wasn't "what's for dinner?", but "how many's for dinner?" And if anyone had a TV set, us kids all banged into their house.

My father was a butcher and he would have brought home a bit of mince steak or whatever, and if there was any left over my mother would have told us to take it up the street to somebody or other. People had more feeling for their neighbours then, though you can still see daughters going up the street with somebody's dinner, with a plate on top of it.

Every day my mother would send me down to the pensioners' bungalows and I would sit chatting with a different one every evening. I was only eight at the time and I really loved it. My mother had carried it on from *her* mother: my granny done it down the Falls – she must have fed every pensioner in her street.

The strength of any community, of course, is dependent upon the individuals of whom it is composed, and *their* primary source of strength originates from the family networks which often spread within and across areas like a patchwork quilt.

Our family was really close. We were all brought up in a two-bedroomed house: all the boys in one room and the girls with our ma and da in the other. I can still remember the moans at bedtime: "Ma, our Billy's pullin' the blankets off us and won't give us any!" Then we moved to Springhill into a four-bedroomed house, and we thought this was brilliant and were fighting over who was going to get which room. Anyway, we sorted it out and that

night me ma went upstairs to check we were all okay – she always did that, to make sure we hadn't kicked the bedclothes off – and she went into the first bedroom. Nobody there. Into the second one – nobody there either! I think she was panickin' by this stage. But in the next room she found us – we had pulled two beds together and there were the lot of us sprawled across them, fast asleep. We felt so close as children and had been so used to lying in bed telling stories to each other, we just couldn't cope with now having a bunk bed each.

But there was hardship, even if the children were not always fully aware of it.

One of the first things I remember about growing up is my da being in work two days, then out of work three days; or in work two weeks, out of work three weeks. It was a constant struggle and my ma was always going out to part-time jobs at odds hours and comin' home wrecked. Though *we* didn't notice this 'cause mostly she worked in cafes and all we were concerned about was the goodies she sometimes brought home. I can also remember, when my da was doing a bit of work on the building sites, actually hoping it would rain, 'cause if it did and he had to come home early we would get his 'piece' toasted for our lunch. So there's me five years of age saying "that's great, there's my da home" without giving any thought that him being home from work meant there was no wages coming into the house, which meant crisis management for the entire weekend.

It was mainly down to the women to manage and how they done it I don't know. I mean even to this day we're always told we're not 'qualified' or 'skilled', and you sit back and ask yourself: "how the hell did we manage for all those years if our people weren't 'skilled'?"

Some of the menfolk didn't help much by pocketing the money – I remember my ma sending us down to the pub on pay day to make sure we got the money off him, or as much of it as he would part with.

My father worked in the shipyard – he played for Crusaders so with hindsight he might have got the job because of his football contacts – and I used to remember him leaving a fiver behind the clock, and it used to break my heart, 'cause I always wondered how my mother managed on so little. So I said that when I started working I would give her every penny I had – such a bloody yarn.

Even before the violence erupted, supposedly educated planners and specialists had already revealed their inability to understand the very essence of what constituted a 'community'.

The idea behind Ballymurphy was that it would be a mixed community. Given the overcrowding in other parts of Belfast, people must have thought it was like a wee bit of heaven getting out to a green-field site with bathrooms and gardens and somewhere to keep the coal. But there was no industry, no work, no school, no community centre, no doctor, no chemist –

no nothin'. And on top of that you had shoddy workmanship the consequences of which we're still living with today.

And today, twenty-seven years after the present phase of our 'Troubles' began, there is a profound awareness that something precious has been irretrievably lost.

Look at the Lower Falls: it used to be a vibrant community, but now the old community spirit has all but been destroyed. Anyone who has anything to do with the Festival knows that the input from the Lower Falls nowadays is negligible, and it's starting to happen with Clonard as well. I really don't know what's going on, or what we can do about it. Perhaps it's too late.

Growing Up in a Divided Society

Inevitably there is always an innocence about childhood experiences.

I grew up in a street where the majority of people were Protestants, but the kids at primary school level were in and out of each other's houses all the time and there was never any trouble. We even dashed into our chapels with them, to show them the confessional boxes, just for a lark.

The way we were reared there was no mention of Protestants. My daddy used to take us to watch the parades and the bands; it was a holiday for us, you got an ice cream an' all.

Even those who sensed they were living next to 'another' community saw it merely as a source of excitement.

We used to go into Protestant areas close to us and burn all their bonfire wood – the measures they went to to hide their wood wasn't ordinary.

But such innocence cannot last for long, and for many people reality was to reveal itself once they reached secondary school age or went out to seek employment.

I remember my mates and I were walkin' down this street and we stopped to chat beside somebody's fence. This man come running out shouting at me: "Get off our wire, ye Fenian fucker!" I hadn't a clue what he was mouthin' on about. Later I got work in Martin Lennon's scarf factory and it was hard going' – luggin' big rolls of patterned material upstairs to the cutters, then to the stitchers. And there was this girl the same age as me, about sixteen, and she left to work in Murray's Tobacco factory, 'cause there was always good wages there. So I said I would try for a job there too, but she just looked at me in surprise and said: "But *you* won't get a job there." And I said "why not?" and she said "sure you're a Catholic." That's when I began to realise that we were relegated to the mills.

At school the teachers, and even the church, urged us to go for training – engineering and all that – but they totally ignored the fact that even if you got training you still had no chance of getting a job. It was the biggest con of all time. Those years, just before you were going to leave school, are very important to the rest of your life and a lot of us wasted them learning something we would never get the opportunity to use. I did get into a training job – in Ballymena – and there were only two Catholics among hundreds of Prods. During the UWC strike the place closed down but we two had turned up for work anyway and the others ganged up on us and we had to flee for safety into the director’s office. And he said “you shouldn’t be working here in the first place, you Fenian bastards” – and that was the bloody manager! It was the only time I can remember ever being glad to see the peelers, ’cause they came and put us on a bus and got us out of there.

But people were not only to experience their society’s ‘divisions’ on an individual level, but on a community level as well.

One of the things I remember was that during the football season you seemed to have the entire population of the Shankill Road walking down Northumberland Street, down Albert Street to get to the match, and then back again, and manys the time they left a trail of devastation behind them.

This reality of living in a divided society – particularly as the nature of the divide ensured it was also an unequal society – necessitated efforts to circumvent its more discriminatory practices.

My father always told us never to put our address down as ‘Falls Road’ on job applications, and to put ‘Broadway’ instead because it was a ‘mixed’ area. But it never made much different for they soon found out your religion when they asked what school you went to, and then you’d no chance of one of the better jobs.

Those who disbelieved that the chasm between Protestants and Catholics could really be that bad often had to experience its depth at first hand to be convinced.

Our da said “don’t go down there to live among them, you’ll only regret it”, and we said “what’s he talkin’ about?”, but we soon got our eyes opened when we did go to live among them. We were taken aback by the depth of their hatred for us.

My first real experience of sectarianism was when we went into the council – I was elected in ’85. I was just speechless; I couldn’t believe the hatred that was coming across the chamber. There were seven Sinn Féin councillors elected that year and Sammy Wilson and themuns were doing their nut. I knew there’d be opposition to us, but you could nearly bite into the hatred, it was just oozing from the other side of the chamber.

Let’s see it for what it is, it’s not just anti-Catholic feeling. Up till recently, there used to be a lot of Chinese living around Donegall Pass and the

Donegall Road and they've all been put out, not because they were Catholics but just because they were different. The Prods are just against anybody who's not the same as them.

While agreeing that the Catholic community's 'collective experience' of Protestant sectarianism has been overwhelmingly negative, some cautioned that the issues involved were more complex.

Catholics can get awful sanctimonious at times – we're not immune from intolerance. I remember this ex-Republican; he and I used to play in a band at nights and afterwards we'd go for a Chinese meal. Well, one night he got drunk and shouted: "why are these Chinese bastards over here stealing our jobs!" Talk about one minority despising another. And look at the way our people treat travellers because they're a different culture from us.

My da was a lapsed Catholic – his own da was a Prod – and wouldn't go to Mass. I remember people shouting at me "Yer fuckin' da's a Prod!" and I really felt bad, 'cause in Catholic eyes Protestants were nobodies. And yet what I know now of Protestants is that a lot of them are very intense people who take their religion very seriously.

Some were concerned that focusing on the divisions that existed *between* the two communities served to hide the existence of discrimination *within* communities.

Look at the way we women are treated. It wasn't so long ago that our only expectation in life was to end up as somebody's wife; and so at home our role was to get the boys' clothes ironed, prepare their breakfasts. . . I remember Easter '79 and we girls got all dressed up and we thought we were gorgeous, and we went to the parade and when we came out of the graveyard we went over to the Felons and they said "sorry, no women on a Sunday," so we went to St John's and they said "sorry, no women on a Sunday". We tried two more places, and finally we just had to go home.

In many ways, the very fact of finding themselves the target of Protestant sectarianism and Unionist discrimination simply reinforced the need of Northern Ireland's Catholics to embrace what they saw as their *own* culture and heritage.

We got a house 'cause we had just returned from living in England and my da had just finished the army. I remember going in and the windows were all whitened out, and on one of them somebody had scrawled 'Fuck the Pope' with his finger. At the time I didn't know why they did that, 'cause in England nobody minded us being Catholics, and they had no problem with seeing us as Irish – yet here, it seemed there was a part of Ireland were you weren't supposed to be Irish, and you weren't even wanted if you were Catholic.

It was while attending the Christian Brothers school that I realised there was such a thing as an Irish language or an Irish culture. There were Gaelic games played – the ban was in force at that time and you weren't allowed to play soccer. You said your prayers in Irish, you answered the roll in Irish.

Now that might still be considered tokenism, but it was highlighting the fact that we were Irish.

I think my identity was crystallised not here but when I went to England. Even staunch Prods are treated like ‘Paddies’ when they go to England. Maybe it would do them the world of good – send them off to live in ‘mother’ England for a few years!

The Impact of the Troubles

When the Civil Rights movement took to the streets in 1968 and 1969 and was met with hostility from an entrenched Unionism the veil which had concealed the deep divisions in Northern Irish society from outside eyes – and many within – was suddenly rent asunder.

I was brought up in a mixed community in Antrim, and everyone seemed to get on well. But when the PD [People’s Democracy] march came to Antrim and got stopped by a counter-demonstration, many of the Protestants in the crowd were our neighbours and business people we knew. It was a real culture shock, ‘cause we had really begun to believe in Terence O’Neill’s ‘moderate Unionist dream’. But it was a good thing, I suppose, because it forced many Catholics to take a stand.

When extensive inter-communal violence swamped the civil rights movement many young people found the new circumstances both exciting and frightening.

One of the recollections I have is of our house being bugged with all these relatives who had been burned out and me saying to myself “what’s going on here?” and for the first time seeing army vehicles driving up the Springfield Road. And when we heard the shooting we weren’t afraid, we ran towards it, to see what was happening – it was an adventure. One minute you’re watching John Wayne on TV fighting on Iwo Jima, the next minute it’s happening outside your window. One minute you’re talkin’ to Brits, wondering what it’s all about, the next minute you’re pissin’ in bottles to smash at them, or bringin’ in buckets with water and vinegar to kill the CS gas, and windows are gettin’ put in everywhere. You watch the TV and they’re sayin’ that the Brits are here to stop all the burning and strife and the next minute they’re beatin’ the shit out of you and wreckin’ the place.

But for most ordinary people – in both communities – the unfolding events were nothing short of tragic.

I remember my parents were burned out of Liffey Street in the Oldpark and they were the most inoffensive people you could have met, so they weren’t

burning out die-hard Republicans, just Catholics. It wasn't the Protestants in the street who did it – up until then we'd all got on well – but they didn't help, just stood by and let it happen. Maybe they were afraid.

As events escalated and a newly emergent IRA declared war upon the British Army even old associations could not withstand the increasing categorisation of Northern Irish society into 'them' and 'us'.

I remember the Brits doin' our house one day, goin' through all the drawers and they found my da's war medals. "Where'd you get these?" they demanded. "I was in the British Army," he says, "I was over in North Africa." But rather than sayin' "this man fought for us", they must've been thinking "this man's an ex-soldier, he could be training people", for they tore the house up even more.

The spiralling violence was to especially traumatise Belfast's working-class areas, Catholics in particular feeling that their whole community was there to be penalised in whatever manner the forces of the state might chose.

The RUC were allowed to do what they liked with our community. When they did our house over it wasn't just the fear I felt, but the humiliation as well. I mean, even my partner doesn't know what I keep in my underwear drawer, and yet it's legally alright for peelers and British Army to go through all my clothes and throw articles of underwear out the window to their sniggering mates outside. You feel like you're being raped, and yet there's absolutely nothing you can do about it.

Despite the horrors both communities were to endure over twenty-five years of violence, for the Catholic working-class communities of Belfast it is still the trauma of 1969 which ultimately fuels communal fears and perceptions to the present day.

The reason I think people in our community have so much determination now was that August '69 was literally a battle for survival – it was either livin' or dyin', and people turned round and said "well, if we're going to die, we'll die, but we're not going to live the way we did prior to '69. Things have utterly changed.

Let's face it, it woke us up to the reality that we were living in a state whose authorities were saying to Catholics: "Youse are fuckin' nothin'; youse don't count for that in our reckoning." And we were goin' to be discriminated against left, right and centre, and have all the repressive powers of the day thrown at us, unless we stood up and said "we've had enough!" And when we said that we realised we had the power to direct our own lives.

That sense of being unwelcome residents in their own city has only of late been partially assuaged.

It's been a long struggle, but we're gettin' there. See that march last year to the City Hall, after us being barred for so many years. . . it was a really strange experience for me to be there, I felt really emotional.

Betrayal

Alongside the feeling that Protestant and Unionist society despised them, many in the Catholic working class felt an added sense of betrayal by those they imagined should have been more supportive.

We had little faith in the Catholic middle class, for we never expected anything from them. For any working-class section of our community to expect anything from the middle class is stupid anyway. Okay, some of the people behind the Civil Rights movement were from the middle class and I think that they were putting it to government that you'd better placate these upwardly mobile Taigs here with some reforms, but when they saw the whole thing go beyond them and that we lot from the backstreets were getting involved in our thousands they weren't long jumpin' off the bandwagon.

We were let down by the South too: we had the likes of Jack Lynch come out with his "we will not stand idly by" speech and yet that's exactly what they done. The British Army was even seen at first as some sort of hope, until the Ballymurphy riots and the Falls Curfew convinced us that they were only here to defend Orange interests.

Ironically, some of the bitterest feelings of Catholic working-class betrayal are directed towards what might appear to outsiders to be an unlikely quarter.

When the violence started up in '69 our community was let down by two different groups of people – the IRA and the Church. In the end the IRA came through, but the Church never did.

The reality of it is that the Catholic Church accepted the situation before '69. I never remember them ever telling us that our people were badly treated, and it was only when people from our community began to get an education that anyone kicked up about it. It was Canon Murphy asked the people to go into Divis Flats and preached it from the pulpit. The fact that the people did as he told them shows you the power of the Church. They were our leaders, alright, but it wasn't the leadership the community needed.

The Catholic Church was ill-prepared for the challenge presented by the 'war' which soon engulfed the Catholic working-class communities of Belfast. More significantly it found itself unwilling to countenance the manner in which some of its priests sided with their parishioners.

Any priest who identified with the people was ousted. Around the early 70s

you had three priests whose parishes by chance coincided with the three [IRA] battalion areas. You had Jack Fitzsimmons up in Lenadoon, who led the people out of there when the Brits occupied some of the flats, and he said: “you want a war? Well, let’s take the people out and you can have a war.” You had Des Wilson in Ballymurphy and Father Tony Marcellus in Ardoyne – he fought the Brits in the street and everything. And they were ostracised and Des was marginalised. That’s what happens to anyone in the church who identifies with the people.

Many working-class Catholics might have understood to some extent the Church’s aversion to becoming embroiled in the escalating situation on the streets. However, they were less forgiving over what they saw as a more fundamental issue – the failure of the Church to prove it was a church which identified with the needs of ordinary people.

Murphy got Mother Theresa’s nuns moved out and he denied it for three Sundays from the pulpit. He was afraid she was going to tell the priests about suffering and poverty and humility, which they couldn’t live up to with their big houses.

I went down to the chapel this day with my friend – I was standing in for her child – and we were hoping to speak to the priest and make arrangements. We waited and waited and nobody came. So I says “we’ll go and knock the door of the flat upstairs and see if any of the priests are in” and she says “you can’t do that, we’re not supposed to go up there!” And I thought: “you’re mad, this is *your* church.” So I went up and rapped the door and the priest came out, his look plainly saying: ‘how dare you rap my door and disturb me!’

I used to run a wee ‘slimming club’ at Tullymore and there was a crowd coming up from the Whiterock and Ballymurphy and it was costing them the taxis up and back. So I said I would run one in the church hall at the back of Corpus Christi just for them, but when we went round the nun said “no, youse might steal our equipment.” The local women said: “this is *our* chapel, we only want a wee corner of the hall.” But the nun and the priest just stood and argued and in the end we didn’t get it.

I’ll tell you a good ’un about Church hypocrisy. You remember the big fléadh down the Falls in ’70. It was brilliant, so it was. Anyway, the next year we put forward a proposal for another one and went to Murphy for his blessing. But he wouldn’t have anything to do with it: “I can’t have this urinating in public places, the fornication going on, the drunkenness.” So we handed him money and he immediately says “well, I’ll tell you what I’ll do – we’ll say a Mass that there’s good weather for it.”

See all these people who ‘bought bricks’, we should get them together to say “look, we own this bit here” and claim it back. Some years ago when they did up St Agnes’s on the Andytown Road they put a sign up in Irish:

Teach an Phobail. Then they must have realised what the literal translation was – ‘The People’s House’ – for within two weeks they took it down again. In ’69 we needed to get into one of the schools to house the refugees and the Church refused, so the people just went and broke the doors down. That’s what we should be talking about – how we can get the power back off them and control over our schools.

Most contributors to the Think Tank still saw themselves as Catholic – although a sizeable minority had long since dispensed with even that label – and their disillusionment was mainly with the Church as an institution: “it’s just another of the forces trying to dictate our lives.”

There is no doubt that if all of us were living in South America we’d all be fervent Catholics; we’d be firmly rooted in liberation theology. If Dessie Wilson was saying Mass in Corpus Christi we’d be there listening to him – somebody you can relate to. It just so happens that the Church and its structures in Ireland are totally out of touch with our reality.

Ironically it’s the Brits who have come to the aid of the Catholic Church, for while the Church is losing political control throughout Ireland and losing social control in areas like ours, ironically they’re increasing their economic control because the British government deliberately channel much of their ACE jobs through them.

Women are coming forward now and opposing the dictates of the Church. I mean, why should I stay in a bad marriage? God didn’t put me on this earth to get beat to a pulp. Women are saying “it’s my right for divorce; it’s my right to decide how many children I want.”

If the Protestant working class could just understand the problems and difficulties that *we* have with the Catholic church; I mean, some of us now have probably less time for the Catholic Church than any of them have.

Despite this growing disillusionment with their Church the Catholic working-class feel no more enamoured of the Protestant state into which they feel they were so unwillingly incorporated.

The Nationalist working-class hadn’t much of a choice, had we? Did we want to be annexed to a right-wing priest-ridden Papish Republic, or did we want to be oppressed in a bigoted sectarian 6-County set-up? Nobody with any brains wanted either, but at least by going in with the South there could have been some hope of reforming the state – the 6-Counties have proven to be unreformable.

The New Generation

At one meeting of the Think Tank a participant passed the comment:

In '69 our generation said “fuck you” to the state; I often wonder whether the present generation are saying “fuck the lot of youse” when you think of what they’ve been born into.

Accordingly, some young people were invited to attend subsequent meetings and they added their own perspective to the deliberations. For a start the political situation which seemed so overriding to the older members of the group was not seen as paramount to young people.

To me the community problem is more important than the political problem. There’s all this shit going on – joyriding, drugs, fighting. It’s going to get really bad, and yet nobody seems to want to work with the young people and see what the problem is. All the beatings are no use, the young people will just retaliate even more against the community. And giving the trouble-makers holidays and things is no use either; it only makes us kids who try to keep out of trouble really resentful. I’ve never been in trouble with the police and nobody’s ever offered to take me away anywhere. Sinn Féin, parents, community groups – they all need to talk to young people to hear what *we* want. There needs to be more meetings like this where young people can have their say, ‘cause after all we’re the future. To tell you the truth, this is the first time anyone has ever asked me for my opinion.

Also, many of today’s youth seem to have transcended the older generation’s fixation with the traditional religious divide.

I think young people are willing to get on with each other. I mean, I hang around with Protestant friends and none of us care much for the ‘Protestant/Catholic’ thing. I think it’s parents raising their children to believe that Catholics or Protestants are bad who are keeping it going; they’re trying to breed *their* bitterness into their kids.

This is an attitude well known to youth workers, some of whom find that other aspects of the communal divide seem more important as determining factors, such as territorial proximity and rivalries.

I’ve worked with a lot of kids and taken them away on summer camps. If I was to take Catholic kids from Andytown and Protestant kids from say Glencairn they’d get on like a house on fire, no problem. But if I take kids from Tiger’s Bay and the nearby New Lodge you’d have your hands full keeping them from goin’ for each other.

With Northern Ireland now more incorporated into the international 'Levis & Cola' culture than it was even a quarter century ago, perhaps young people find the obsession with religious identity simply boring and irrelevant. There is a similar disenchantment with politics, as much because politicians have ignored the needs of young people.

We're not interested in the political thing because we don't understand it. I mean, you have politicians coming on TV and most young people feel they're just talking a load of waffle. None of them try to explain to young people what it's all about. Not one person – Sinn Féin or nobody – came to young people around here to get their ideas on the Ceasefire or the future of this country; we had no say in the matter.

This comment occasioned some soul-searching among Republican activists.

We have to admit that down the years young people and women have been used in a cynical way by Republicans. Women have been relegated to being the gun-carriers or whatever and youth weren't brought together to try and empower them – they were just identified as people who could do a wee bit or carry gear or thump somebody. We should be helping to develop young people, and make it clear they weren't to be used as cannon-fodder.

There was a feeling too that the Republican movement had lost touch with the present generation.

I became involved in Republicanism as a youth, not from any family tradition, but mainly from reading and seeing the situation on the streets. But there was a youth organisation then I could identify with and from which I got my cultural and political education. I think that when they did away with their youth wing the Republican movement left a huge vacuum for our young people. And now, instead of being able to look up to the Republican movement, many young people – rightly or wrongly – see Republicans as oppressing them just as the state does. Young people express themselves through drink or dabbling in drugs or whatever and their experience of the Republican movement is basically a negative one.

What happened was that you had these cranky right-wing Catholic IRA men and there was no other job to offer them so they said "you look after the Fianna", and that was the greatest blunder ever made. Wee lads seen this crowd and said "Fuck, I don't want to be in with that lot" and they rebelled against it. And when they finally stood it down there was a corresponding rise in youth anti-social behaviour. And eventually the IRA became to be seen as part of the 'establishment', oppressing kids.

I would like to see the Republican movement making a serious effort to establish a youth movement. Look at all the other political parties – they all have youth wings, because they realise the importance of youth. Surely to ensure the survival of the Republican message the Republican movement needs to do the same?

However, not everyone was happy with the idea of re-establishing a youth wing.

I don't agree. It would scare me if it started up again. Half the kids ended up inside. If they're connected with anything Republican they'll be taken to Castlereagh and beat till a pulp.

Even former prisoners expressed doubts.

You'll find that there are very few IRA men with sons who would want them to get involved; they don't want them to have to go through all that they went through.

The stress was then placed on personal development rather than the 'struggle'.

It doesn't have to have any military role; just an organisation which helps young people understand their culture and history and helps give them a sense of personal worth. At present there's a breakdown in values in our society and young people don't even identify with their own communities, and in turn are seen as destructive, anti-social elements.

However, the young people themselves were not prepared to fall in so readily with other people's designs for them.

Young people don't like the way they are being treated and being ignored. I want to be able to grow up as a good part of the community, and I would like to be able to look up to people like you say were in the Fianna, but at the moment I think the Republican movement needs to clean up its own backyard before they start trying to teach young people anything.

There was an ambivalence too about the 'war', in which the understandable desire to remain loyal to the 'struggle' conflicted with more peaceful inclinations.

I wouldn't be happy if the violence continues but I do look at the people who have died fighting for our country over the years and wonder what we would say to them if we just gave everything up?

I don't think the gun is a solution. I mean, no disrespect to the ones that have died for the cause, but the only thing violence ever got us was a very long death-list. We've had twenty-five years of it and where's the solution? I think that we have to get both communities here together, 'cause we're the ones that have to live with it.

What if the Ceasefire doesn't come back and the talks don't work? If we go back to war, just who's going to fight that war? There's no fighting generation; the young people I hang about with don't want to know any more.

The honest opinions expressed by the young people certainly gave cause for thought, especially to those whose lives had been spent within the Republican movement.

Republicans are in a 'no win' situation. If they *don't* react to all the anti-

social activity which is making people's lives a misery then the community criticises them; but whenever they *do* respond the media make them out to be IRA thugs or whatever. However, I accept a lot of what the young people are saying here. There does seem to be a breakdown in communications between the Republican movement and young people, and even the community at large. It really needs to be looked at.

Political Realities and the Ceasefire

Whatever political arrangements our politicians eventually hobble together – assuming they manage to find both the willingness and ability to compromise – will be fundamentally flawed unless they take cognisance of the reality as perceived by both working-class communities. For Belfast's Catholic working class in particular it is what they have actually gone through, rather than any supposedly inborn attitudes, which determines how they perceive that reality.

The Unionists were always obsessed with the threat from Irish nationalism, but if they had offered Catholics a genuine equality I am convinced Republicanism as an ideology would be near enough dead. People around here aren't Republican because of something coming through their mothers' milk – they're Republican because of their experiences.

For many those experiences not only remain indelibly imprinted as a potent part of the 'community consciousness', they are the yardstick by which any claims to present progress are measured.

I can remember back to when the present 'Troubles' all started and as far as I'm concerned little has basically changed. We're still discriminated against. Our 'Irishness' is still denigrated. Many of the same mainstream Unionists politicians are not only still in place, but they retain the same old attitudes and still play the same games. The British and the Unionists have a nerve calling for a 'quarantine' period for Republicans. They've had 75 years to prove to us that they could create some sort of equality here – they failed and they continue to fail. *They* are the ones who should be put in quarantine.

I was twelve or thirteen in 1969 and I can remember the widespread fear there was. Images of houses being burnt and people fleeing with whatever furniture they had. Stories about the 'B' Specials, made worse by all the rumours. There was a genuine fear of what was going to happen next, of whether we would be annihilated, and our one crying need was for defence. I don't think outsiders realise that that fear is just as relevant now. We can never allow ourselves to return to a pre-'69 situation again where we find ourselves defenceless. If the IRA were to decommission their weapons

tomorrow, somebody else would just start up another organisation to do that role. It baffles me why they can't understand that. If the IRA have to hand in their guns, then the RUC *have* to get off our streets.

This perception that 'nothing has changed' was heightened by the British and Unionist response – or, more significantly, lack of response – to the period of Ceasefire.

We gave them seventeen months to make some moves, and they could have made even cosmetic moves – they could have recognised the Irish language; could have funded Irish schools; made some moves towards reconstructing the RUC; brought our prisoners home from English jails; released more prisoners here; made a genuine effort to get into negotiations – things that would have consolidated the Ceasefire. Even if they had done only a couple of these things it would have made it very difficult for the IRA to go back to war. The people wouldn't have accepted it, for they would have seen some changes happening. But no, they didn't do anything. Well, certainly not for our community anyway; they were quite happy to look after their 'own' though, as the release of Private Lee Clegg showed. That really proved that they still want to rub our noses in the dirt – especially when one of our people has already served twenty-one years in jail in England for a *non-capital* offence.

British Government claims that responses *have* been made – the opening of border roads; the ending of Army patrols; the lifting of broadcasting restrictions, etc – are derisively dismissed.

Look, those things were the *products* of this war, not the *causes* of it. They can list such things till they're blue in the face; it's only when they begin to tackle the *causes* behind this conflict that we will get anywhere.

There is also widespread resentment at what is seen as a deliberate attempt to obscure the circumstances which fuelled the conflict.

I've been watching all the TV programmes and they keep bringing up the IRA bombs, and the IRA this and the IRA that – they forget that *we* have suffered; it's as if no Catholics ever got shot dead – all the killing was done by the IRA. When the Ceasefire was called, I was genuinely happy there'd be no more killings, but at the same time I was scared, really scared. 'Cause the same RUC men who murdered us and tortured us for years are still walking round as calm as you like – particularly two of them I see all the time – and it turns my stomach. How would Protestants like it if IRA men decided to parade up and down *their* streets. No, without the IRA there to protect us I feel scared – if it hadn't been for the IRA we'd still be on our knees.

There is a cynicism too about the widespread demonstrations for 'peace'.

Even the 'peace' campaign is aimed solely at the Republican movement – "Ceasefire now, give us back our peace." No one is bothering to look at *all*

the elements in the equation, *all* the contradictions that need to be confronted.

It was a joke Dick Spring launching that white ribbon thing, instead of doing something substantive politically. *We* want peace too, but there's an anger around here: you get all these crowds downtown shouting about peace, but where were all these people during the past seventeen months, why weren't they out *consolidating* peace, calling for talks to begin, instead of coming out of the woodwork once the Ceasefire's broken down!

The belief is that a permanent 'peace' cannot be secured until a genuine dialogue emerges, but while all the politicians demand the former they subvert attempts to initiate the latter.

These people are playing games with people's lives. They just refuse to recognise that Sinn Féin has a legitimate mandate. You have the likes of Mayhew saying that the British would love to facilitate negotiations but unless Republicans respond to X, Y and Z, and then jump through these different hoops, the Unionists won't come and speak with Sinn Féin – though I believe it was the Brits who convinced the Unionists to take a firmer line. And if we did do all that was presently asked, what next? The Republican movement would probably have to give a guarantee they were no longer organising, no longer recruiting. . . and finally the IRA and Sinn Féin would no doubt have to commit themselves to dissolving before we got to any meaningful discussions.

The ending of the IRA Ceasefire with the Canary Wharf bombing in London engendered mixed emotions.

I think that people didn't agree with the bomb but they understood why it happened. With all the frustration that had built up over eighteen months what did the government expect? They seriously miscalculated. I think they thought that the longer the Ceasefire held the harder it would be for the IRA to recommence.

The response I get from ninety-nine per cent of Republicans is that they regret the Ceasefire being over, and that conflicts with the stereotyping in the British media that we're all bloodthirsty militarists who're just dying to get the gear out and get back at them. The majority of people I speak to who have done prison sentences are reluctant to talk of their involvement in the taking of someone's life. It's not something they glory in; they are mostly people who got caught up in circumstances where they felt they had no other course of action.

I think that it's inevitable there will be armed conflict in Ireland while there isn't a just settlement. If there's a situation people can't live with, it's inevitable that people will lift up arms again; either us or the Loyalists.

What about the Protestants?

Irrespective of the divisions which exist between the Catholic and Protestant working-class communities of Belfast, there is nevertheless an awareness of Protestant concerns.

If you look at the growth of Nationalist West Belfast and the way the Protestant areas have had to thin right out, you can understand why they feel so threatened. And although we're still twice as likely to be unemployed, they've lost all their big industrial concerns – Courtaulds, Michelen. . . There are kids on the Shankill now with no education, no skills; the old apprenticeships they used to step into are all gone; they really have their backs to the wall – I mean, Glencairn is worse than anywhere around here. But do they blame the system? A few in the fringe parties do, but the others prefer to blame us Catholics. Why? They still want to see us as their biggest threat.

I think there could be many areas of agreement, even over things like policing. I believe that if you talk to ordinary Protestants they haven't a great love for the RUC either – they've put the boot into the Shankill as well as up here. Yet it always amazes me the way the Protestant people come out and support them. It's just another of the contradictions inherent within Loyalism. They seem to work on the basis that what's bad for us must be good for them, so while they might detest the RUC, any attempt by us to interfere with the RUC is a threat to their State.

There is, however, a certain cynicism with regard to Protestant assertions of their 'Britishness'.

What *is* this 'Britishness'? The Prods claim they are 'British' and yet when they go over to 'mainland Britain' they get treated as if they are Irish! Anyway, as far as I can see their much-proclaimed identification with Britain is a one-way thing, *and they know it*. The Prods don't trust the Brits any more than we do, and I don't blame them – the Brits will dump them when it suits them.

But assuming that the Protestant population of north-east Ireland will not hurriedly relinquish its 'British' identity, can Irish Nationalism accommodate this 'Britishness'?

As far as I'm concerned they're Irish like everyone else. Their Orange songs and traditions are as much a part of this island's heritage as 'The Rocky Road to Dublin'. My Republicanism comes from the Protestant community. I identify with the Battle of the Boyne, and I don't even have a problem with the word 'British' – it's an old Celtic term. I would welcome

their ‘British’ heritage and culture – but not if it comes with the old Imperial arrogance and the racist superiority and stuff like that. Their Britishness is too often simply anti anything that’s Irish. When they learn Gaelic, they won’t admit they’re learning ‘Irish’, they say they’re learning ‘the Ulster dialect’. When I tell any I meet that I too am proud to be an Ulsterman they don’t understand, with me being a Catholic. Their traditions don’t seem to include us.

At one of our first [Think Tank] meetings we discovered that half of us either had fathers who were ex-servicemen or had Protestants in our families. We’re a mixture of identities on this island – it’s all about inclusiveness, it’s not about exclusiveness. It’s about constructing a society that accommodates us all. If their Britishness is a dynamic, forward-looking identity that can contribute positively to this society, then okay; but not if it’s something still hankering for the good old days when the Empire ruled two-thirds of the world. ‘Cause *we* are not looking for some Celtic dawn re-enacted either.

Even if the Protestant community *could* ever be persuaded to enter a unitary state – a somewhat forlorn expectation – is anything practical being done to facilitate any transition?

These people are saying that they’re afraid of a Southern confessional state taking over; well, we share those fears.

Yes, but sharing fears is one thing, you have to accommodate them as well, and I don’t think Nationalists have done enough on that yet.

We cannot take hundreds of thousands of reluctant Prods into a United Ireland, or we’re going to have the same problem all over again. We are not going to get all *we* want; we have to work out an *agreed* Ireland together.

The Unionist people *are* the British presence in Ireland, and we Republicans have to learn how to take that into account. We have to agree an Ireland with them, one that respects their identity. There’s another way of looking at it as well. People fail to take into consideration that the most radicalised sections of the working-class live in the 6-Counties and that includes the Protestant working-class. Together we could act as a dynamo to fundamentally change *both* parts of Ireland.

What is clear from such sentiments – and it is something evident in the Shankill Think Tank deliberations as well – is that each community is now endeavouring to understand reality as seen by the ‘other’ community. It has not always been like this, however, as one contributor pointed out:

I’m glad to hear such sentiments, but it’s only been in the last few years that they have begun to be voiced. For too long the feeling was that those who called themselves ‘British’ were Irishmen who hadn’t ‘seen the light’ yet. I don’t think the Republican movement has ever seriously sought to come to

terms with the Protestant community. Probably the reason why Republicans remained so obsessed with ‘the Brits’ was because by fighting against an *external* enemy a war could be justified. But having to come to terms with the *internal* British presence – represented by the Protestant community – would rule a war out of the question. For violence aimed at throwing the Brits *out* of Ireland was guaranteed to prevent Protestants coming *into* a United Ireland. And so it was easier to simply ignore them.

What of the Future?

After a quarter-century of conflict, what is it that Belfast’s Catholic working class expect to achieve? Some individuals have very clear goals.

My top line is a 32-County socialist republic, but I know that that’s not going to be achievable in the short term. My bottom line is open-ended, all-inclusive, comprehensive negotiations leading to a settlement. Negotiations that might take five, seven, maybe ten years, but in which every party and grouping involved in the conflict is included, and I would extend that to community bodies as well – for they represent the people who have suffered directly from the conflict. At the conference everything would be on the table – the constitution of the Irish Republic and Articles 2 and 3; the British would put the 1922 Government of Ireland Act. . . and at the end of it, a referendum should take place throughout the 32 counties. And if the Unionists complained that it had nothing to do with people in the 26-Counties, that it was a ‘UK matter’, then I’d propose that they included the people of England, Scotland and Wales as well and make it a *real* ‘UK matter’. I’m confident that *they* want the Unionists no more than most Free Staters want us.

The logic of this last comment – that both communities in the North have been spurned by their erstwhile friends in Great Britain and the Republic – might suggest that an Independent Ulster could be an attractive option, but for the Catholic working class it is a non-starter, mainly because of the genuine fear that such an entity would merely consolidate the ‘Protestant Ascendancy’ in new guise, a perception present exponents of Independence within the Protestant community have made few serious attempts to counteract.

There *might* be options that fall short of a United Ireland, but so far I’m unconvinced that any would work. All we want is to be treated decently, equally and justly and the analysis that Republicans have and consistently had is that the only way that will happen is when our national rights are tied in with our civil rights. If somebody comes along and assures me that my

civil and human rights can be safeguarded within a 6-County set-up I'd have to look at that. But so far they haven't do so, and history seems to prove that they are unable to do so.

Some are opposed to an 'internal' solution as a matter of principle.

I'm against this idea of a 6-County and a 26-County referendum taking place simultaneously. Are the results to be taken together, or is the 6-County result to stand by itself? If so, then that's just recognising Partition.

There can't be an internal settlement – it won't work. Unless there is an *agreed* Ireland it is almost inevitable that in fifteen to twenty years my children will be condemned to more war.

Others base their aversion more on the reality as experienced by their community.

Any 'internal' solution would depend upon the Unionists being even-handed, but their history shows they find that impossible. Never once in the history of this state did they reach out to the Catholic community and it still seems beyond them. If they'd acted differently – or even looked as if they could act differently in the future – we might have considered a 6-County referendum.

It's not just us Catholics who Unionist politicians want to keep subservient, it's the people of the Shankill as well. Every time they see ordinary Unionists and Nationalists coming together, even over something small, they go in and divide them. An 'internal' solution would just be used to keep the working class divided.

Before you back a horse you study its form. Look at the present form of the Unionist Party. They treat our elected representatives like pariahs. They're not just snubbing Sinn Féin, they're snubbing a whole section of the Nationalist people – it is *we* who are being disenfranchised. David Trimble keeps insisting that everything should be done by democracy, through elections – yet he then turns around and says that the votes of the people who select Sinn Féin are somehow less valid than everyone else's.

Despite this aversion to an 'internal' solution, many feel that some such 'deal' is going to be imposed upon them regardless.

But that's what looks like happening, thanks to the Nationalist parties in the 26-Counties. With their support, we're headed for an internal solution; we're not going to get self-determination for the Irish people as a whole; and the Brits aren't going to be put under any pressure to give a declaration of intent to withdraw.

Where does this leave the Catholic working class?

I personally feel Republicans should break off all negotiations with the Irish and British governments and the SDLP, and go back to their own community, organise meetings and hear what people in working-class areas want. In the

absence of armed struggle we need to build up a new anti-Imperialist front to push our demands and aspirations. We can't trust the others, especially the Brits – all the way down the line they've been trying to screw Republicans, to force an IRA surrender, to debase the IRA in the eyes of the rest of the people of Ireland.

Many feel a profound disillusionment with the current 'peace process'.

Look at the way the Brits have manoeuvred and manipulated the peace process. It hasn't been a 'peace' process, it has been a 'pacification' process. We're now at a stage where Sinn Féin have to call upon the IRA to reinstate their ceasefire just so that they can be included in discussions on an internal settlement! It's a nonsense! During the Hunger Strike campaign I really thought we had the Brits on the bounce. Now I'm looking around and asking myself what the whole twenty-five years was about, my involvement and commitment, the friends and family members I've seen imprisoned and dead – for what? To beg somebody for the right to go and speak at a 6-County Stormont Assembly?

The present mood within the Catholic working class is – if the contributions to the Think Tank are an accurate reflection of opinion – dangerously pessimistic.

People want peace but we're not afraid of going back to war and the British Government must not miscalculate again. They shouldn't be relying on the paramilitaries to give us peace – *it's up to democracy to prove itself*, prove that it can provide us with peace. Yet the posturing that is going on at present, especially from Trimble and Paisley, makes people believe that democracy is a farce.

There is an acceptance that the *only* place where genuine attempts to reach an accommodation are taking place is at the grassroots, and cross-community contacts have been established which were unthinkable a few years before. Nevertheless these contacts carry their own risks.

I think that one of the good things over the past eighteen months is that people have begun to talk about the suffering and the violence. But we're not being nearly honest enough about it. We need to get everything out, we need to be a bit rough with each other. I mean, I need to hear Protestants tell me that they feel the Republican movement has been sticking it up their backsides for years. But when I've been at community meetings recently and I admit that I want peace but I also have Republican aspirations, *they* sit there and say nothing, and I feel I've left myself vulnerable if things go bad again.

Others have been involved in contacts with Protestant community activists, however, which have been more substantial and meaningful, and have necessitated much soul-searching.

I would like to think that *all* of us have learned something after twenty-seven years – not just about the other community but about our *own*

community. We can't afford to hold on to the old dogmas just for their own sake. I think both communities should be undertaking a thorough re-evaluation of *everything*.

Those who feel this way suggest that not only must everything be 'put on the table' in dialogue between the two communities and the governments, but the same must happen *within* communities – with nothing being considered sacrosanct. While majority opinion within the Catholic working-class favours some form of 'agreed Ireland' it was not the only option voiced. The oldest contributor to the Think Tank made the following suggestion:

I feel the IRA are caught in a time-warp. Those who seek an all-Ireland Republic are not looking at *today's* needs of the Irish people. History moves us all on. The Irish struggled forlornly for the House of Stuart and their gallant king ran away on them. Then they fought for Protestant Ulster's gift to the downtrodden Catholic Irish, Republicanism, until the Free State crushed it with extraordinary ruthlessness. I feel it is now time to transcend Republicanism as well – for its guns and bombs have been for bus-drivers and cops and the commonplace servants of ordinary society. Anyway, why should Belfast, the cradle of egalitarian Republicanism, have to submit to Dublin, the traditional seat of English influence and conservative Catholic reverence for the Imperial connection. Neither Dublin nor London is central to the needs of the population of these islands any more. But Ulster *is* ideally placed to play a dominant role in a *new Union* of the two islands.

An untypical view, certainly, but at least it reveals that a re-evaluation has at least started, and many sincerely hope that it leads somewhere positive.

Ireland is still far too much of a religious country. Not only is religion tangled up with politics, but we even turn our politics into a religion. Loyalism and Republicanism both have their saints and dogmas and rituals. It is high time we went beyond all this and created something new and meaningful.

Perhaps one final suggestion made to the Falls Think Tank might give thought for reflection, not on *where* that re-evaluation might lead, but *who* it is undertaken with.

Whether our future lies in a unitary Irish state or in a so-called 'new Union', there is nothing necessarily inclusive about either. We first have to build that inclusiveness from *within*, and there's no better place to start than among the working class of Belfast. So why are we sitting here in a separate room from the Shankill Think Tank – why are we not all together in one bloody Think Tank? The Southern politicians are always saying they are trying to protect the interests of northern Nationalists, and the British are trying to safeguard the interests of the Unionists. These people may think they speak for us, but as far as I am concerned *none* of them speak for the Falls or the Shankill at all. Only *we* can do that and we could do that more effectively if we spoke with one voice.

Overview

Meetings of the Falls Think Tank took place on Fridays from noon to 2pm, and as soon as they had ended I would immediately make my way over to the Shankill, to attend meetings of the Shankill Think Tank, which commenced at 2.15pm. Now outsiders might imagine – if they were to believe the stereotyping so prevalent in the media – that having to co-chair two such seemingly disparate gatherings in quick succession must have been something of a ‘culture shock’. On the contrary, I was always struck most forcibly not by the *differences* between the two Think Tanks, but by the *similarities*.

There was the same concern with the problems of everyday living; the same intense community pride, as well as a shared fear that the old community spirit was being gradually eroded; the same expressions of hurt and pain; the same irritation at being constantly marginalised, misunderstood, misinterpreted; the same anger and sense of betrayal; the same deep-seated desire for peace, though not peace at any price; the same determination to continue the ‘fight’ if that was what was required; the same disillusionment with politicians and all their shenanigans; the same openness and bluntness, but also the same preparedness to listen; and occasionally the same tentative question asked of me: “what do ‘they’ think about that over there?”

If you could have obscured the murals which decorated gable walls not far from each of the two venues and blocked out certain ‘identifying’ words while each participant was speaking, then the two Think Tanks could easily have appeared as one and the same. Indeed, I never really felt as if I was attending meetings of people from two *separate* communities, but people from the *same* community, who by circumstances of history had found themselves estranged from one another. I am convinced that history will ultimately resolve that estrangement.

On those issues where common ground was patently evident – particularly with regard to social and economic disadvantage – I feel that a joint approach could easily be engendered. Where the real differences lay, however, concerned issues of cultural identity and political aspiration. On such matters it is harder to envisage the emergence of a consensus, particularly when even the words in which the respective aspirations are packaged are themselves heavily problematic. When Unionists say that their ‘consent’ to any new arrangement is paramount, Nationalists interpret it more as a ‘veto’, claiming that Partition has manufactured false parameters within which such ‘consent’ is determined. When Nationalists insist they are seeking an ‘agreed’ Ireland, Loyalists interpret it as meaning little more than *their*

agreement to an eventual United Ireland, and not Nationalist preparedness to 'agree' to the possibility of an Ireland in continued Union with Great Britain.

Even the word 'compromise' creates ambiguities. One Nationalist said that he accepted that a United Ireland was not possible in the immediate term, therefore he was prepared to 'compromise' by waiting for it to come about over ten, fifteen or twenty years. To Unionist minds this is hardly what *they* would term a 'compromise'. Likewise when Loyalists say that they could 'compromise' by ensuring that the aspirations of the Catholic minority were accommodated within the institutions of a new Northern Ireland, to many Nationalists this is not so much a compromise as a contradiction, for their greatest aspiration is *not to be in* a separate Northern Ireland.

Perhaps, then, a first step might be to set aside for a moment the vexed questions of political agenda, and concentrate on developing some degree of *common parlance*. For despite these differences in interpretation, the one significant development of recent years – and one which was conspicuous by its absence throughout most of our quarter century of violence – is the very fact that concepts such as 'agreement' and 'consent' are now actually being addressed.

With regard to the broader political questions, what can be done to reconcile the irreconcilable? Probably not a lot in the short term. My own feeling, however – and one reinforced by my attendance at the two Think Tanks – is that if even a partial resolution *can* be achieved, it will not emanate from the corridors of power, but from the grassroots, where the desire to build a new future is more deeply-felt and much more sincere. Party-political democracy has failed the people of Northern Ireland, and, judging by present posturing, seems set to continue to do so.

Mostly unseen and unacknowledged by politicians and media commentators, a grassroots debate *has* been under way in the last few years. People, whether as individuals or within community groups, *are* reaching out across the divide, and while the success of these cumulative efforts must remain unquantifiable, the very persistence of this grassroots process is this society's best chance for the future. Hopefully a small but significant part in that process can be played by the Community Think Tanks, not only through their continuing efforts within each community, but, perhaps not too far off into the future, by combining their energies and sitting down *together* to confront the task of reconstruction.

Michael Hall