

Republicanism in transition

(5) An engagement with Loyalists

compiled by

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Introduction

This is the fifth in a series of pamphlets focusing on the theme *Republicanism in transition*, the purpose of which is to facilitate debate and dialogue at the republican grassroots. (The first four pamphlets – Island Pamphlets nos. 96, 97, 98 and 99 – are available as free pdfs from <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/islandpublications>)

The individuals who participated in the discussions from which these pamphlets have been compiled are either current members, or were former members, of a number of different republican groupings: Official Republican Movement, éirígí, Republican Network for Unity, Irish Republican Socialist Party, Republican Sinn Féin, 32 County Sovereignty Movement, and Sinn Féin.

Throughout the discussions held to date almost every participant has spoken of the need to engage with the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist working class, in order to fulfil Wolfe Tone's dream of uniting 'Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter'. There is a awareness that any such engagement cannot be one-sided or patronising. As one participant remarked, 'No longer can we make the assumption that Ulster Protestants are really misguided Irishmen who one morning will wake up and realise their *true* identity', but rather that their 'views and traditions and culture have to be taken into consideration.'

The pamphlets have restated the desire of republicans to build bridges with the Protestant community, and this has been acknowledged by those loyalists who have read them. Nevertheless, most loyalists still remain deeply sceptical about republican intentions, if not antagonistic – pointing to comments such as the one which suggested that for the Protestant working class 'to buy into socialism' they had 'to recognise that the ideology of unionism or loyalism or Orangeism is inherently reactionary.'

The idea behind this fifth series of discussions was to bring the republican participants into a face-to-face engagement with loyalists (specifically members of the UDA [Ulster Defence Association] and UVF [Ulster Volunteer Force]). Although things did not go exactly to plan, a forthright elaboration of views took place, and republicans were made fully aware of the political and cultural barriers which still impede the realisation of Tone's dream.

Michael Hall *Farset Community Think Tanks Co-ordinator*

Discussion 1

Around a dozen loyalists had expressed a willingness to engage with their republican counterparts. There was a concern, however, that bringing everyone together in one room might prove problematic, with the risk that two blocs would simply form and inhibit a genuine dialogue. It was decided that a series of smaller groups might better serve the facilitation of dialogue.

The first group to be convened comprised individuals who had been working together on cross-community issues for some time, focusing particularly on the needs of young people. Involving members of ORM [Official Republican Movement], IRSP [Irish Republican Socialist Party], and the UDA [Ulster Defence Association], it was felt that it would be useful to hear how such individuals managed to deal with one another's deeply-held political and cultural beliefs.

In the following quotes [R] indicates a republican speaker, [L] a loyalist.

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Loyalty and royalty?

- As you know there have been a series of discussions on the theme ‘Republicanism in transition’. And practically every participant in those discussions has expressed the hope that republicans will begin to make productive inroads into the Protestant community, particularly the working-class loyalist community. The purpose of this current round of meetings is to take that a step further, by bringing Loyalists into a direct engagement with the republican participants. To ask questions of one another. What do Protestants/loyalists actually think about republicanism? What do republicans want to say to those in the Protestant/loyalist community? . . . So – anyone care to start?

[R] As a republican I am totally opposed to the concept of monarchy. I am sometimes asked whether, if we had a united Ireland, it should join the Commonwealth, and I say ‘no’. When I am asked why, I say: I have spent all my adult life, I have lost my liberty on two occasions, to fight against something that I feel is outdated, outmoded: the concept of monarchy. To join the Commonwealth would mean that I had wasted my active political life, because the head of that Commonwealth is a monarch, who is there by birthright and not by merit.

- But of the 50-plus countries which make up the Commonwealth, 60% of them are republics.

[R] Yes, I accept that. But the head of that Commonwealth is a constitutional monarch, and the concept of monarchy in the 21st century is anathema to me. As for being an Irish Republican. . . I was a member of the Official IRA. My Irishness is because I am from the island of Ireland, my republicanism is because I believe in a republican form of government. I believe that the whole concept of monarchy and its power and privileges is totally outdated in today's world.

- Does this mean that Irish republicanism, because it is opposed to monarchy, can't appeal to Ulster loyalists, because the majority are loyal to a monarch?

[R] You could put that question another way. If the British people eventually decide that they want to live in a republic, where does that leave 'loyalists' in Northern Ireland? I believe that in the rest of the UK people don't feel the same loyalty to the *institution* of monarchy as they once did: their loyalty is to the Queen herself, as a person. Indeed, ten years ago the monarchy was in deep trouble. The fact that it has recovered is really down to the efforts of one 86-year-old lady who has conducted herself in a way which has won over a lot of doubting people in Britain.

[L] I disagree. The only reason the monarchy has become more popular again is not really because of the Queen, but because of the new blood coming up – William and Kate, and Prince Harry. And with Prince Harry going out and having a good time like normal people, and being prepared to mix with normal people. I think that's why the monarchy has come back into popularity again.

[L] Look at the drop in number of the street parties held for the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. In 1977 there wasn't a street didn't have its own party. But there wasn't anything like the same response the other day. You could drive along the Shankill [Road] this time without hindrance. And some of the parties which were held were organised by the paramilitaries. Even take the Union flag: you see less and less being flown in Protestant working-class areas.

[L] You talked there about being opposed to the power the monarchy wields. But do they have any real power? Are they the rulers of the country? Not really. The Queen is only a figurehead; it is Parliament which holds the power. It's like the Irish Presidency: no power whatsoever, you just wheel them out every now and then, and get them to shake people's hands. I don't particularly agree with the money they get paid, or the assets they hold within Britain, but I am British and the reason I would be loyal to the Queen is because she is the figurehead of the UK.

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- Is your loyalty to Britishness rather than to the monarchy?

[L] Yes. I would be loyal to the Royal Family more by default. My real loyalty is to my Britishness.

- If Britain was a republic, you'd still be loyal to it?

[L] Yes. Even if the monarchy eventually goes I will still be British. I served six years in the British Army and I am proud to be British. And I am proud of the things that the British Army has done, and what Britain has achieved both at home and abroad. Speaking as a former soldier, I know that those fellas got sent out to countries which they maybe knew nothing about, but they went there with the best of intentions and without malice. And many of them gave their lives. Okay, you will always get arseholes who maybe did things they weren't meant to. And it's the same in Northern Ireland. I used to have guys come to me asking 'what's Northern Ireland like?' These fellas didn't know anything about Northern Ireland; they were coming over here in a terrible state, nervous, some of them didn't know what planet they were on. Some of them were having trauma issues.

[L] I am British, my identity is British, but although I respect the Queen as a person I don't need to be loyal to her to feel British. And I *do* have a lot of respect for her. We have to acknowledge that there is a community out there who are staunchly loyal to the monarchy. I also have to say that I think the Queen took a big step in holding out the hand of friendship when she visited the Republic last year, going to Croke Park, and laying a wreath to those who lost their lives fighting against Britain. She lost family members as well, so that was a big step for her. So regardless of what she is, or what she stands for, I truly believe that what she did to extend the hand of friendship between Britain and Ireland was important, and genuine.

[L] For me, there's the past, and then there's the present. As someone from the Protestant/loyalist community, who was nurtured in it and am still living in it, at this moment I've no loyalty to the monarchy. Nor have I any loyalty to some concept of 'Britishness'. Right now I am fifty-five years of age, I have had all these experiences, I spent a lot of time in jail, I have had lots of time to reflect and think. I have done lots of different work internationally. But right now, I'm not going to pick up a gun to fight for the British Crown. Nor am I going to pick a gun up and fight for some perception of identity, for Britishness or whatever. Years ago, in the past, that was different, but no longer.

[R] That's your *present*; where do you see the future?

[L] The future for me is a bigger global question. As an observer, watching what's going on around the world, I see a global breakdown in most ideological points of view. It's happening everywhere, in every country. All the major political ideologies: Marxism, Socialism, Communism, dictatorships... the whole shebang is now all in question. I think the real questions are not local any more, but are

those facing the entire human race: what is the way forward, can people of all countries coexist on our planet?

[R] I think you are very brave to admit all that. But I would agree with you. I think that, to a greater or lesser extent, the majority of people here probably feel that way: they have doubts regarding what they were brought up to believe. But most people are afraid to say this openly, because if you start expressing doubts – especially about your own community’s perceived identity and allegiances – you risk being labelled a traitor.

A conflict of national identities

[R] The conflict is not between Republicanism and Loyalism, although it is portrayed that way, and maybe that’s where the sharp end of it is. The conflict is, and has been for hundreds of years, two national identities claiming the one piece of land. Outsiders often say: people of different religions can live together in other countries, why can’t you lot do that here? They can’t live together here because each is claiming the land that we’re all sitting on. Some people say it is part of Ireland, others that it is part of Britain: that’s what the conflict is about. And republicanism is used as a term for United Irishmen, for nationalists, yet only a minority of nationalists would be truly republican. Even if they vote for republican parties, very few of them would be republican in the sense of Wolfe Tone. Tone’s republicanism had one primary component: the unity of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter, in the common name of Irishman. He didn’t insert a clause saying that if you gathered enough Catholics to the republican cause then it didn’t matter about the Protestants. But that’s what happened. Republicanism was harnessed by Nationalism. But to claim the conflict is between republicans who believe in the concept of a political republic and loyalists who support a monarchy, is too simplistic. It is national identity which is at the core of the divisions here.

- If Irish Republicanism has become so interwoven with the purely nationalist struggle, can it ever disentangle itself and return to its core principles?

[R] I think there is a growing acceptance in today’s society that in order to have your national identity you don’t need to have *exclusive ownership* of the land you’re standing on; I think that land and nationality are beginning to be separated, and that different identities can now share the same space. In the past it wasn’t like that, it was a ‘them or us’ situation – if ‘they’ are winning then ‘we’ must be losing; ‘our’ community can only protect itself by subduing the ‘other’.

I think that land and nationality are beginning to be separated, and that different identities can now share the same space. In the past it wasn’t like that, it was a ‘them or us’ situation.

that the Unionists or loyalists were trying to make me like them, and wouldn't let me be what I wanted to be. I couldn't see that, on a larger scale, the Protestants thought that the South was trying to do the same to them. But I think we have passed that stage. I don't think anybody in Ireland, North or South, believes that the 'other' crowd is going to make them stop being what they are. I think we have reached the stage where we have accepted that one section of the people are going to be British for as long as they want to be, and the other section are going to be Irish for as long as they want to be.... That's been resolved.

Under threat?

- What do loyalists feel about republicanism? Do they still see it as a threat?

[L] To me it is always a threat when someone comes at you with a belief which contains a deep sense of righteousness. Even when republicans seek accommodation with us, they do so still firmly believing that their republicanism is historically 'right' while our loyalism is historically 'wrong'. Even worse – it's as if republicans are saying to us: it is *you people* who were to blame for everything, you people who are to blame for our lack of liberty, for our grief and trauma. Republicans might have ended their armed conflict, but there has been no compromise on the sense of righteousness which drove it.

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[L] People in the Protestant community are still feeling very much on the defensive, still feel under threat, and believe that with Sinn Féin now in power the Protestant community will be slowly manipulated and cajoled into the long-term republican agenda.

[R] That is a perfectly acceptable analysis, because that's what Adams is telling everybody. Every speech he is making he is saying: this is just one more step on the road to a united Ireland. It was not all that long ago that he was saying we would have a united Ireland by 2016. So I can understand the fear that you express. But a united Ireland is nowhere near the horizon, and ironically, not because Protestants don't want it, but because most Northern Catholics, and perhaps many people down South, don't want it either.

[L] I lived in Moyard, an integrated area. One night my mother runs into the house – my uncle had been shot. Within a day of that you have to move, flee across fields to safe ground, into my granny's on the West Circular Road. I was about thirteen years of age. There was no sense of politics in my head; there was not even any sense of religion. It was just black and white – it was all about defence. A bit like what you said earlier, that 'they' were trying to take something away

from me... and it was just as simple as that. I didn't become politicised until I had about six years of a life sentence done. There is a mass of people out there – not just in the Protestant community but also within the Catholic community – who are not educated politically. But they are influenced on a sectarian vote, because of their different identities. And not much has changed.

[L] Do you see that phrase: 'uniting Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter'? I see it being used by different republican groups. It is on their websites, yet on the same webpage there will be a picture of an Orangeman with his face blacked out, or an appeal to 'stand together and not let these people walk'. I see the phrase being used all the time, but it doesn't seem genuine, for it is completely at odds with the numerous attacks on Protestant expressions of their culture. So, to me, I feel it is all lies: they truly desire to get rid of us. Their websites are full of anti-Protestant venom. Now, I know from working with people that not all republicans are like that. I know there is an integrity there among many republicans, but there are a large number out there who I feel are purely sectarian.

[R] What you're saying is true. Even within our own organisation, I'd be sitting with people and often you're listening to extreme nationalist views, even within a socialist organisation. And there are guys who have never ever come up to the likes of Farset and engaged with Protestants or loyalists in any way. They're just sitting there in their own wee cocoons. Even in my local pub I have heard sectarian rants: 'Don't let them down there, keep them out, we should do this, or do that to them.' Now, these attitudes are often disguised in different ways but when things are stripped down to the bones you often find a naked sectarianism.

What is republicanism?

[L] When people use the word 'Republicanism', to be perfectly honest, my question is: what do you actually mean? What does it mean in social and political terms? How would it differ from the parliamentary democracy we already have?

[R] There's Republicanism and there's Irish Republicanism. To be a republican means that you believe in a republican form of government. To define Irish Republicanism is more problematic. United Irelandism existed in Ireland before Republicanism. When the Gaelic leaders and the Old English who didn't go with the Reformation came together and created Irish nationalism, the one thing they had in common was their Catholicism. So Irish nationalism in its beginning was Catholic, and that was how it remained until 1798, when Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen brought in a different concept, following on from the American and French revolutions. Now, at that time republicanism and Tom Paine and his *Rights of Man* was like what Communism was twenty to thirty years ago: it scared the shit out of the clergy, the political establishment, the landed gentry and such. The concept was completely revolutionary. And at the core of republicanism

was the concept that the old animosities in Ireland had to be done away with, and Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter brought together in the common name of Irishmen. Those who don't believe in that core concept, or don't act on it, cannot consider themselves as true republicans; they are simply Irish nationalists.

Ourselves alone?

[L] I don't actually have a problem with republicanism. I have my own beliefs, other people have got theirs. Everyone is entitled to hold to their beliefs, whether their Britishness or their republicanism. But the irony is that while we proclaim our Britishness and republicans proclaim their desire for Irish unity, the British government has no interest in Northern Ireland, and the Irish government has no interest either. Let's be honest about it. Neither Britain nor the Republic care a toss about us: they're quite happy for us to continue on the way we are.

[R] As you said, neither Britain nor the South really cares about us here. Yet we have two political blocs in Stormont. One whose aim is to ensure that there is going to be this Republic; the other to ensure that there is not. And that's why the two communities vote for them, even though we all admit that it is an irrelevance – the national question has been shelved and our politics should be about other things. We still think we're the centre of the universe, but to be honest we live in the arsehole of nowhere. And we're all going to have to realise that politics is a far bigger thing than what is going on 'up on the hill' there [the Northern Ireland Assembly on Stormont Hill]; that's nonsense what's going on up there.

What of the future?

[L] As I said earlier, to me it is now a bigger global question: if you have kids, where in twenty years' time do you want them to be? It is also personal. Seventeen years I lost, and a lot of friends, and childhood friends, and took lives... It is personal because it was because of what somebody else determined in their ideology that I did what I did, and for me all I was was a pawn in that game.

[R] There have been a lot of people sitting back and reflecting and soul-searching. And I know people can hit you with all these historical facts, about what happened at such and such a time, and who did what to whom. But is it not time to be asking new questions. Like: what was it all about? *why* was such and such done? do we have to continue in this way? will our history just repeat itself? And that questioning process must be personal too: why did you join the organisation you were in? do you still believe what you believed thirty years ago? It is vital that we ask these questions, because the sectarianism is still

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there, and many people are still saying that if push came to shove they'd go out and get back into it again. And you're trying to debate with these guys and asking: what's making you feel like that? Is your day now just long and bored? Is it because you've lost some sort of status within your area? Are you longing for that adrenaline buzz again? If so, then that is a ridiculous reason for wanting to take us all back to what it was like not that long ago.

[R] Too many people are looking up at that lot on the hill for an alternative, but you're not going to get it up there. You're only going to get at the grassroots. Sectarianism seems insurmountable, but we have to work against it. But to do that there has to be an alternative. You have to say to the Protestant people: look, you can remain Protestants, but you don't have to be in constant conflict with the 'other' community. Same with the Catholic community. We have to work out a new alternative. You can remain what you are but get rid of the hate. Think about your children, think about jobs, education – the welfare state is being stripped from under us while we're worrying about all this.

[L] Republicans like yourselves are willing to say things like this, and enter into a genuine debate, one which will also involve self-questioning. But the ones who are in power, Sinn Féin, to this day will not admit that the IRA were sectarian during the conflict. And that's a big stumbling block. I have been at different meetings and raised this with them, and they won't even listen to the word.

[R] If you look at the two major blocs who are up on the hill – if we have true reconciliation and make inroads into sectarianism, what is *their* future? It is not in their interests. The war might be over but the conflict is not.

[L] There are some very wealthy people in the DUP – like Ian Paisley Junior and Peter Robinson – and they haven't got a clue about our everyday lives. They come into our communities every now and then and make all these great promises. But they have no real interest. These people are out for themselves; politics is a family business for many of them. They only care about the middle class. Now, will working-class Catholics and Protestants ever get away from their in-groups and out-groups, and say: let's put up candidates on working-class issues? It would be a massive step, but could people do that? I'm not so sure. The only solution I can see is when both Protestants and Catholics come together, forget about all the bullshit, all the ideology, all the beliefs – for none of it helps to look after your kids, or put a loaf of bread on your table. Is there going to be a time here when we can get together and work towards a better future?

The need for a new politics?

[L] The working class needs to come together, because it is about regeneration, employment, education... and everything which goes along with that, and about getting people working together, and their communities back up where they

should be. On the politics side of it, from the UDA background, going back to the *Beyond the Religious Divide* and *Common Sense* documents when politics was at the forefront, and people were trying to move forward. . . The problem is that there's not so much of that politics about today.

[R] If you try and create something new, those in political power will always see it as a threat, and that's when you'll come up against strong opposition. With those UDA initiatives you referred to, and when the likes of Billy Mitchell and David Ervine came out and started talking new politics, you could see the fear in mainstream Unionism: if these guys here get themselves sorted out, we're in trouble. Gone will be the days when we can just sail into the Shankill from our big mansions and say 'This we will maintain' or 'No Surrender!', for they're starting to educate themselves and get themselves sorted out.

[L] Look at the last election. 57% of the Protestant people voted. The DUP got 60% of that 57%, which means that they got 34% of the Protestant vote. Yet they say they are the voice of Loyalism and Unionism because they have this 'great mandate'. But two-thirds of Protestants didn't vote for them.

[L] The problem for us – in terms of moving into politics – is that if you come from a loyalist ex-combatant background you're looked upon as being to blame for all this. Nationalist ex-combatants had far better support in their communities than loyalists did in theirs. Especially from the Protestant middle class – we were the people to blame. So whenever our people were trying to go into politics, in the background were these negative perceptions: I can't vote for him, he did this or he did that. That wasn't as big an issue in the nationalist community. In fact, it can't have been or Sinn Féin wouldn't be the force they are today.

[R] There's a big cultural difference between Irish Nationalism and Irish Unionism. Irish nationalism never had power for hundreds of years, so all classes within society had an input into it. On the Irish Unionist side, however, the approach was that the ruling class would look after the working class, all the working class had to do was be loyal to them. And that still filters down to this day.

[L] I am fifty-five now, and others around this table are of a similar age. It won't be that long before whatever influence we have in our communities will start to diminish. So, we have to determine our priorities: where do we put our effort and focus? And to me that focus should be on the next generations coming up. Now, I don't have children but I have worked with many kids, and the hell do I want them to go through what we did. I think the work that we are doing – and probably what everyone around this table is doing – is trying to get people, especially young people, away from all this obsessive identity stuff, and give them a better vision of their future.

[R] You were right to bring in the thing about age. When you were a twenty-year-old and a group of people in their fifties came along and started telling you what

to do you would have said ‘f__k away off!’ We have a kind of an arrogance now, saying that we have gone through all this stuff, therefore we know the reality of it. But yet if we *don’t* do that, what’ll be our legacy? It’s okay saying later that we were against sectarianism, and we wanted such and such, but then people will rightly say: ‘Yes, but apart from complaining about sectarianism, what did you actually *do* about it?’ If we don’t get together and do something constructive, then this window of opportunity will be gone.

[L] I stood on the Woodvale on Saturday night, getting a chip, and I looked over towards the Mountainview Bar, and there were all these young men dressed up in band uniforms and thumping drums and doing all of that. And I just felt despair at how little most of them, if not all of them, know about politics. Because nothing has changed over the years. When I was in jail most of the young men who came into that jail didn’t know shit about politics. They were mostly doing what everyone else in their community was doing, without much political thought put into it. The only ones who had the political thoughts were the older, more educated adults. But for the most part the foot soldiers, the ones who went out and lifted the gun – and I can speak personally – didn’t have any political awareness. Today there hasn’t been much change. And in the work I do today with people I ask them: what is it you want out of life? I will work with you to achieve contentment, a life that’s not just about survival, but is about satisfaction and contentment with what you’ve got. Now, that is working on a one-to-one level, but it’s no different from the bigger question: how can we *all* work together to achieve a sense of satisfaction and contentment, so that we’re not being manipulated, dominated, cheated, by whoever it might be. It’s about educating people. Whether we like it or not, there’s a whole population of people out there who are just going along with a sectarian way of thinking, because they don’t know anything else. There doesn’t seem to be an alternative.

[L] If people are stuck in the past then it is the past that is going to drive them. As I said earlier, the same guys who flaunt the phrase about ‘uniting Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter’ yet demonise all Orangemen are stuck in the past. It must be about getting into the future.

[L] There is something about identity, and the righteousness that comes along with it, which always gets in the way. And a starting part for getting past that is for people to start listening to each other. In my experience, when we really sit down and suspend all of our ideological baggage and open up and truly listen to someone else, it actually surprises everyone what we have got in common with one another. Especially the working classes.

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• Do you think that if we ever move towards something more constructive it will be of a nature which *transcends* all that we currently hold to here: our republicanism, our loyalism, our Britishness, our Irishness... ? Maybe even our discussion here today about Republicanism and Loyalism will become increasingly irrelevant. Indeed, maybe it has already gone past that?

[L] I think it *has* gone past that.

[R] I would agree with you.

[R] But there has to be a vehicle, a venue, a tangible ongoing forum for debate to which new ideas can be brought, explored and debated. Now, out of a range of discussions between different people a proposal has been developed for a social-labour Forum, to begin a new debate. Exploring people's views as to how we could make this society better. A forum where people can come along and say: yes, I am a loyalist, or I am a republican, but I agree that there has to be another way found. I agree that the defence of the national health service is the most important thing at this moment for my family, rather than ideological differences, or events which happened hundreds of years ago. Find out what the commonalities are, through this continuous debate. We can invite people from 'up on the hill' to it, not only to hear what they have to say but to listen to what *we* have to say. You are not asking anyone to give up any part of their respective identities, we would just be moving towards addressing everyday, shared concerns: those things which would take us into a better future for our children and grandchildren. And, say an election came around, this Forum would maybe agree a '10-point plan' around those shared issues: education, housing. . . whatever. And any candidate standing in those elections would be asked where they stood on those ten points, and if a candidate did agree to support the ten points then we would call for cross-community support for them. We wouldn't be asking people to give those candidates their first or second preference votes – which would inevitably be given to their normal 'tribal' parties – but maybe their third preference vote, *irrespective* if that candidate was from the other tribe, and solely because he or she supported the ten points. Once people start voting for someone who is not from their tribe, by basing it on common issues, then you might begin to break down the sectarian stranglehold on our society. There *has* to be an alternative, or else we are all just going to go round and round in circles.

[L] I could go with that. I could back that. Indeed, I said earlier that there were things I would no longer defend, but that is something I *would* defend. It would give people a fair shot if they achieved those objectives.

[R] Invite a wide cross-community involvement, including academics and people from the arts. Then invite people – politicians and others – to make presentations or sit on a 'question and answer' panel.

[L] Even if such a Forum doesn't materialise for some time, I believe the likes

of us in this room should be more proactive. We should be initiating far more things, rather than being the ones invited to give talks to some quango and then be told: ‘Thanks very much; now you all go back to where you came from.’

- When most people in this society talk of ‘we’ they are usually referring to their ‘own’ community, their own tribe. But what I am sensing from this discussion today is that when any of you talk of ‘we’ you are talking *inclusively*.

[R] I would agree. But once we all leave this room that ‘we’ will not exist – unless we have a thing like the Forum where it can be developed and consolidated.

[L] I like the idea. That kind of Forum could possibly lead on to something bigger. But only if you got people truly committed to it, committed to moving this society forward. There are too many people in this society who are determined to remain victims. That needs to be changed. There are tours up and down the Shankill and the Falls, and it’s all about victimhood: we were victims of this, we were victims of that. We are starting to call these tours ‘MOPE Tours’: Most Oppressed People Ever! That needs to change. I like the idea of a Forum where people come with the genuine intention of trying to create something different and better in this society, for everybody.

[L] It will scare a lot of people, because many people in positions of power are frightened of change, and if they see people talking in a different way they will do their best to demonise it or destroy it – or at the very least manipulate it.

[R] Yes, we would have to be on our guard against the take-over merchants. And the established political parties will try to dismiss it, saying that such important matters like this should ‘be left to us’ to handle – ‘after all, aren’t we your elected representatives?’

[R] I know men who have never, ever sat down to talk to Protestant/Loyalist/Unionist people. The best you can do is encourage an open, honest and genuine debate. There has been too much dishonesty in our politics, at every level, not just among the ‘folks on the hill’.

[L] It shows you how important it is. We started off this meeting today by talking about Republicanism and Loyalism, and now we have got to the crux of what it is all about. It is about us working together; it is about agreeing a common agenda. And it is about our young ones, it is about employment, about creating an alternative to what is happening up at Stormont at the minute. And that is the big conversation. Because that conversation is about what is happening *now*, not about what happened back then.

We started off this meeting today by talking about Republicanism and Loyalism, and now we have got to the crux of what it is all about. It is about us working together; it is about agreeing a common agenda.

Loyalist comments

The first discussion group not only proved productive, but aroused no controversy. Perhaps this was because the participants had already been working for some time on joint initiatives. However, just as the second and third discussion groups were about to be convened circumstances abruptly changed.

After being informed of the identities of the republicans who would be taking part, the leadership of the UVF decided that none of their members should participate in the discussions, as it was their contention that some of the republicans were closely associated with ‘organisations not on ceasefire’. A leading member of the UDA felt that his organisation’s response would be similar. It was intimated that meetings with some of the ‘other’ republicans in the group would prove less problematic. However, as this discussion process has striven to remain inclusive of all shades of republican thinking, this was not an acceptable option.

Nevertheless, many loyalists who had been following this pamphlet debate with interest remained of the firm belief that republicans should be made aware of loyalist concerns and attitudes. Accordingly, a number of them (along with some Protestant community workers with an interest in Irish and Ulster history) were interviewed and the views they expressed are set out below.

Notes:

[1] In all discussions held to date most of the republican participants have tended to view the word ‘dissident’ as simply meaning someone who dissents, without necessarily implying that it is synonymous with support for armed action. The loyalists quoted below, however, have invariably used the term to describe individuals or organisations who support, or are engaged in, armed actions.

[2] The quotes were gathered from a number of separate interviews – with either one or two individuals present – and then collated under different themes.

* * * * *

This section begins with three quotes which had been introduced into an earlier discussion (in 2011), and which had led one republican to remark that they served as ‘a reality check as to what people in the Protestant community are thinking . . . and revealed how poles apart we still are’.

- One of the republicans you quoted [*Island Pamphlet* No. 97, page 33] claimed that protests against the Orange Order were not an attack on the Protestant community’s sense of Britishness, but undertaken in a ‘principled manner’, because the Order is a ‘reactionary, misogynist, elitist and supremacist’ organisation. Now,

in our dealings with socialist republicans we have heard some of them describe the Catholic Church in an almost identical manner. However, despite this desire of republicans to act in a ‘principled manner’ against ‘reactionary’ organisations, the only organisation some of them seem eager to confront is the Orange Order. Protestants believe that much of this talk about ‘principles’ is just a smokescreen and that behind many republican protests lies a blatant sectarianism.

- Socialist republicans continually assert that the refusal of the Protestant working class to join with the Catholic working class in a United Ireland is an example of ‘false consciousness’ and a denial of our true class interests. I believe the opposite to be the case. Marx believed that all classes in any society undertake actions which serve to protect or advance their economic interests. This is not necessarily a conscious process, but one driven by the dynamics of class struggle. Using a purely Marxian analysis, therefore, I believe that the Protestant working-class position – to seek to remain part of the British economic set-up and the hard-won gains of the British labour movement – is the one *truly* based on class realities. It is when other ‘needs’ are linked in with the class question – such as nationalism – that the label of ‘false consciousness’ can be more accurately applied.

- I resent the way Irish republicans/nationalists continually ask me why I see myself as British, and to define what ‘Britishness’ means. I would never have the arrogance to ask an Irish person why they see themselves as Irish, or to define ‘Irishness’ for me. I would accept *their* identity without question – so why can’t they accept mine?

I resent the way Irish republicans/nationalists continually ask me why I see myself as British, and to define what ‘Britishness’ means. I would accept their identity without question – so why can’t they accept mine?

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The remainder of the quotes were recorded in June 2012.

1798 and all that . . .

- Republicans don’t seem to have learnt how best to promote their cause among Protestants. Take recently when a number of republican groups got together to oppose a beacon being lit on the Cave Hill as part of the Queen’s Jubilee celebrations – saying it would be an insult to the memory of the United Irishmen. Now, anyone genuinely wishing to promote the United Irish ideal – the unity of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter – would surely avoid doing so in a spirit of antagonism to the current allegiances of the Protestant community. I was amazed to see them play the old territorial game: ‘The Cave Hill belongs to Republicans, not to Royalists.’ People in this country, in *both* communities, are like dogs pissing against lampposts in the way we mark out our respective territories. It certainly

didn't promote a positive view of Republicanism among Protestants: we just saw it as them taking yet another opportunity to attack our culture.

- I would agree with that. Republicans claim that Protestants would have nothing to fear in a united Ireland; that our religion and culture – even our Britishness – would be permitted free expression. However, I can just picture how it would work in reality. ‘We want to hold a British cultural event on the Cave Hill.’ Sorry, that spot is sacred to the United Irishmen. ‘Can we hold a parade along O’Connell Street in Dublin?’ No, sorry, you would be passing the GPO which is sacred to the memory of 1916. ‘Can we hold an Orange march along such and such a road?’ Sorry, three Catholic families have recently moved into that area and they might find it objectionable. And so on... It is *their* history and culture which would dominate in any united Ireland; *our* history and culture would be pushed to one side in the hope that it could be gradually whittled away.

It is their history and culture which would dominate in any united Ireland; our history and culture would be pushed to one side in the hope that it could be gradually whittled away.

- Republicans talk a lot about 1798. But it was the bloody sectarian aspects of the Rising in the South – such as the massacre of Protestants at Scullabogue and the slaughter of Protestant captives at Wexford – which turned many Protestants away from the United Irish message. Protestants felt: if this is what ‘Irish freedom’ means, we don’t want anything to do with it, for it is certainly not for us. If republicans had really learnt the lessons of 1798 they would know that if they want to encourage unity of ‘Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter’ they shouldn’t act in ways which seek to attack or demonise aspects of our culture. For it only serves to reinforce – rather than to diminish – the historical and cultural barriers which exist between us.

- Many republicans either say openly, or believe privately, that the Protestant people don’t have a legitimate culture – whatever culture we profess is a form of false consciousness. Irish republicans want to box our culture into a corner; after all, their culture is seemingly the only correct one.

- See all this constant harking on about the ‘evil English’ and what the British did to the Irish, and all the rest of it? I would say to them: look, there is *no region* of the UK which didn’t suffer at the hands of the ruling political or commercial classes. Whether it was the Tolpuddle Martyrs, the Highland Clearances, or the deprivation and disease suffered by ordinary people in the slums and factories – we have *all* suffered, or been persecuted, in one way or another. But this is 2012 – it is *today’s* battles we should be fighting, not those of the past.

- I am well aware that throughout our history many Protestants – from Wolfe Tone to Roger Casement – have felt attracted to Irish nationalism or Irish republicanism. [*See Appendix for more on this theme.*] However, the attitudes and actions of

present-day Irish Republicans, including the IRA and more recently the dissident groups, have guaranteed that such an attraction is almost non-existent within today's Protestant community. Once Republicanism departed from the original ideals of the Presbyterian leaders of the United Irishmen, and became synonymous with a militant Catholic Nationalism, it lost all hope of achieving those ideals.

- The way in which Irish nationalism and Irish republicanism has tried to force itself upon us has been completely self-defeating.
- People in the loyalist community are exploring things we never would have explored before, especially Irish history. And when we do so we try to understand the nationalist view of that history. But I don't think republicans are trying to understand *our* side of Irish history.
- I am British in my nationality and Irish in my culture. I have no problem with anything that is Irish, or comes from this land in which I was born. The United Irishmen fascinate me; indeed, I feel a real affinity to the United Irishmen, just as I feel anger about the Famine and things like that. I don't like the fact that Protestants don't properly celebrate St. Patrick, don't celebrate our Irishness. And that came about for two reasons: Irish nationalists told us it wasn't ours, and we agreed it wasn't ours. I love the fact that there's a Gaeltacht, that Irish symbols are used in our regiments... like the wolfhound mascot Brian Boru, or the way they 'drown the shamrock' on St. Patrick's Day. I feel very comfortable with that. I have no problem having strong relationships with the Republic of Ireland, for our mutual benefit. But I still want to stay in the Union.

What do the 'dissidents' hope to achieve?

- At this minute all I have is contempt for dissidents. I don't believe there is any necessity for them to exist.
- I will tell you what will *not* convince me about Irish Republicanism. Shooting a policeman will not convince me. Putting a bomb somewhere will not convince me. Causing disruption will not convince me. Their intention to disrupt events planned for Londonderry during the 'Year of Culture' will not convince me. *Why* do the dissidents want to do all this? What do they hope to achieve? Look, the war is over – they have no part to play, they need to go away and get a job and start raising their families, the way normal human beings do.
- To be honest, I am happy that there is a dissident campaign, because it helps push any prospect of a United Ireland even further into the distance. I am more worried about Sinn Féin's softly-softly approach; it could potentially pay more dividends for Republicans.
- In the world of global politics, the European Union, and all the rest of it, nationalisms are becoming more and more irrelevant to people's everyday lives.

Republicans should move into the world of today. They used to accuse us of being stuck in 1690; well, they're just as stuck in 1916. We all need to move on.

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- I have a real problem understanding where the dissidents are coming from. I served in the British Army, and I was always taught to respect the IRA as one of the most effective terrorist organisations in the world. Now, if the IRA – and groups like the INLA and the Official IRA – over thirty years of conflict couldn't succeed militarily, do the lights not start coming on in these people's heads?
- To most Protestants these dissidents just look like gangsters, who are maybe doing a bit of drug-dealing and using politics for cover. And the reason it seems that way is that there is no cohesiveness coming out from what they are saying. No ideology. And their sectarian rants against Orangemen contradict their claims to want to unite Catholics and Protestants. I have no doubt that there are intelligent people among them but I am at a total loss to understand what they are about and what they hope to achieve.
- I would like to ask them: why are you using Protestant culture to have your power struggle with Sinn Féin? Okay, the Orange Order is not perfect, nor are the bands, but people are genuinely trying to get things to a more acceptable state. There is no triumphalism now, no-one is sticking their fingers up, so why not let them walk past the Ardoyne community – it would only take seven minutes? Why don't they just come out and say they have a problem with Sinn Féin and parading provides the most convenient battleground?
- I don't think their opposition to Orange marches is necessarily to do with their hatred for Sinn Féin. I think it gives them something to focus on, rather than have to explain what their republicanism is all about. I mean, what does it actually stand for? I constantly hear what Republicans are *against* but I never hear them say what they are *for*. Is it just about having the Tricolour fly throughout the island? Is that all it is?
- Some of them keep demanding 'Brits Out!' But where are the Brits? Yes, there are still some Army bases here, but they're not patrolling the streets, and probably never will again. I have seen these propaganda videos the dissidents are feeding kids, about the 1970s when estates were locked down by the Army and police. But that is living in the past. It's almost as if they wish it was like that again.
- I think many republicans have come, very belatedly, to the realisation that the 'Brits' in Ireland are not the 30,000 military people – the Army, the police – but the Protestant people who have lived here for many generations. And we have always felt that when republicans were calling for 'Brits Out' they meant us.

But the Protestant community is an unmovable part of this place. Don't forget that the Plantation of Ulster is *older* than the British settlement of America†, and you would be laughed at if you tried to suggest that Americans of British, or even Irish, descent should get on the boats and depart the US. But you get the feeling that many republicans still feel that that's what should happen to us. It's as if the Plantation only happened yesterday.

- It's unbelievable the risks the dissidents are willing to take. Like that time when they put a bobby-trap bomb on a child's bike on the Antrim Road. What were the chances of a passing child thinking: 'free bike!' and jumping on it? Or if they throw a pipe bomb at the police and a child gets in the way – what then? Maybe they just don't care.

- During the Troubles Sinn Féin made all sorts of excuses about the circumstances people were in: 'Unfortunately things will happen in a war, and this is why, even though we regret this particular incident, we can't condemn it.' But those days are gone. There are absolutely *no circumstances* now – political or otherwise – which would justify a child's life being put at risk. And most people realise that. Look at Londonderry: people there are openly critical of the dissidents. I think the dissidents are on a hiding to nothing. A united Ireland is not around the corner, and these people need to wake up and realise that.

There are absolutely no circumstances now – political or otherwise – which would justify a child's life being put at risk.

- Whatever is driving the dissidents, it's certainly not a concern for the civil and human rights of ordinary people. I think ordinary people are sick, sore and tired of paramilitarism and all the rest of it.

- Some of them use the word 'socialist'; but I don't think they know what the word means. A socialist would not stick a random bomb in the middle of a housing estate; a socialist wouldn't go out shooting policemen, or doing any of those things. If they think that is socialism they want to go back and read up on it.

- And they claim there's no such a thing as a 'progressive' unionist; that we can't be truly socialist *and* loyalist at the same time. What about the millions of Labour people in Great Britain? Is their socialism a 'false consciousness' too?

- I have a number of questions I'd like to ask the dissidents. First of all, what difference is their present campaign going to make to our working-class communities? I'll tell you. More people murdered, more people ending up in jail, more people losing their fathers, brothers, sisters or whatever – that's *all* it's likely to achieve. And do they think that if there is a united Ireland tomorrow

† In 1606 the organised colonisation of Ulster commenced with private plantation undertaken by wealthy landowners. May 1607 saw the first permanent English settlement, in what was to become the United States, at Jamestown, Virginia.

that the British/Unionist/Loyalist people are going to go skipping down the road hand in hand with them? Even if there is a united Ireland, what is *their* role going to be within it? And if any all-Ireland government is not to their liking, will they use ‘armed struggle’ against it?

- I am probably different from a lot of people from a loyalist background in that I don’t find republicanism hard to swallow; I would class myself as a British republican. But I really think that in today’s world political and nationalistic ideologies matter less and less; we live in a world of global economics and politics. And my own journey, from being a former combatant to community worker – for me it’s now about the working man and the rights of man, and coming together on social issues for the betterment of everybody. As for the Irish republican movement, the main players – the IRA and Sinn Féin – signed up to the Good Friday Agreement, which was ratified by the people and the constitutional question was put on the back burner. I think those republicans who want to undo that are acting against history, not to mention the wishes of the Irish people. And what can they claim to be fighting for? The inequalities highlighted in the Civil Rights days have been rectified; we have probably more equality legislation here than anywhere in the world. In the seventies and eighties they had played for every sympathy card around the world – the ‘poor me’ syndrome, the ‘downtrodden people’ – but Northern Ireland has changed dramatically, and even if Irish republicans can’t see that, the rest of the world does, and I don’t think anybody listens to them any more. All the former inequalities have been corrected and the two islands are moving on in a new partnership. Any violence only serves to show the dissidents up as anti-Brit, anti-Orange and anti-Protestant.

- Violence was totally destructive for all our communities. The DUP frustrated loyalists because they wouldn’t fight and yet they wouldn’t talk. Even though Paisley loudly proclaimed that he would lead us in a war to destroy the IRA, the DUP sat on the sidelines while kids from Protestant working-class areas filled up the jails. It wasn’t *their* sons and daughters who went to jail; they were still going to Queen’s [University], still getting professional jobs. And then they disowned us. That would have been okay if, while not wanting to engage in the fight, at least they had been willing to *talk* us all out of our problems. It is only very belatedly that they proved willing to do this. I think they finally realised, as did Sinn Féin and the IRA, that the only way to resolve anything was to sit down and talk; that violence, or threats of violence, was totally counter-productive. Surely the dissidents must have learned that lesson too?

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In defence of the Union

- In 1921 Protestants had a genuine fear for their religion when they opposed a united Ireland. And those fears proved well-founded. Political leaders in the South, including the Taoiseach, have admitted, and apologised for, the treatment of Protestants in the early decades of the Republic. That religious fear would not be there today, given that the power and influence of the Catholic Church in the Republic has greatly diminished. No, leaving aside the inherent loyalty to Queen and country and all that, the continued desire to remain outside a united Ireland is more and more based on political and economic considerations. People in Northern Ireland – including an increasing number of Catholics – believe they are better off within the United Kingdom.
- John O’Dowd [Sinn Féin MLA] was recently on *Question Time*, and one of the audience asked about the Jubilee celebrations. And O’Dowd said he couldn’t understand why any people would have an allegiance to an unelected head of state. But for a long time the Republic effectively had the Pope as *its* unelected head of state. At least the Queen is subject to the law of the land, whereas in the Republic, as was revealed during the child abuse scandals, the Vatican allowed the Irish [church] hierarchy to ignore the civil law. I was in London this week, and you could see the economic advantages of having a palace and a Queen, and William and Kate and all the rest of it. We were near Buckingham Palace and the whole of the Mall was bugged with people, from all over the world. In tourism terms, you can’t buy that. And as for this thing about the Queen getting all this money from the state, I would imagine that the money the monarchy *generates* actually exceeds the money given to them. I would totally agree with O’Dowd about not wanting an unelected head of state, who decides on all aspects of my life. But the Queen isn’t in any position to do that; our lives are governed by a parliamentary democracy, so I have no problem supporting her.
- I would ask republicans: your ideology might sound great, and undoubtedly in its purest form has much merit, but in real-life terms how could your republicanism actually benefit your sons, daughters, or grandchildren, in their everyday lives? Because *any* new Ireland will have a government much as the Republic has at present, and there will be little difference between it and any other European government. The working class will still have to fight to protect its corner, much as it has always done. The *only* possible difference will be that people will be able to tell themselves that they are ‘free at last’. But free to do what? To be exploited in the same old way? Does that justify dragging our communities back to war?
- There is going to be a protest about the Queen coming over to see what republicans have termed ‘her Irish colony’. According to them she shouldn’t be coming here at all. It just seems so petty. I mean, if the Taoiseach comes up

here it doesn't bother me. He is not taking my Britishness away from me. I met the last Taoiseach, I have made some good friends in the Irish government and they are more than welcome to come up here. The Queen has been to loads of countries which once had big problems with the British, and nobody gets uptight: this seems to be the only place where people can't move on.

- My Britishness never came from the monarchy, it came from the people. Every country has a head of state – whether a president, a prime minister or a monarch – but it is the institutions of the country and its cultural heritage which make it worth being loyal to. And for me my Britishness was always about the people, and the institutions of law and government which they fought so hard to achieve.

My Britishness was always about the people, and the institutions of law and government which they fought so hard to achieve.

‘Ulster at the crossroads’

- I believe republicans could serve their aims far better if they showed themselves willing to make a genuine effort to build a peaceful and progressive society here in Northern Ireland first. Now, no doubt Sinn Féin are watching over their shoulders at hardline republicans – and this is why they constantly come out with all the ‘this is a step on the road to unity’ stuff – but the irony is that by doing so they are actually putting off any prospect of a united Ireland. And as for the current dissident campaign – it is actively safeguarding the Union. I believe – and I am saying this even though I wish to remain in the UK – that if Sinn Féin reached out a genuine hand of friendship to Ulster Protestants, and made it their priority to work in partnership for the sake of Northern Ireland they might make more inroads into the Protestant community, especially around shared concerns.

- The Catholic birth-rate has dropped, and the political aspirations of the Catholic community are changing; many of them want to remain in the UK, a fact confirmed by recent opinion polls. Which takes us back to Terence O’Neill and his ‘Crossroads’ speech: ‘We are at the crossroads. What type of Ulster do you want?’ That question is still relevant. Do we want to concentrate on creating a society here where everybody has equal rights, proper education, a good health service and all the rest of it? Or do we want to waste our energies on fighting the battles of yesterday? That’s the choice *all* of us will have to make.

- I would like to ask republicans what they are actually doing to make the Loyalist/Unionist/Protestant people comfortable with the idea of republicanism? How are they reaching out proactively to us? I have Catholic workers work for me. We work with Protestant and Catholic kids on a regular basis, take them away and let them mix with one another. Ironically, *we* are the ones trying to bring together ‘Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter’; but what are *they* doing about it?

Discussion 2

After a document containing the ‘Loyalist comments’ had been circulated among the republican participants, a date was agreed for the group to reconvene and discuss its contents. Although most members of the group had expressed an eagerness to participate in this discussion, on the day itself, for whatever reason, only half those who had committed themselves to coming actually did so.

- I see our numbers today are not what you had anticipated. Perhaps last night’s announcement [that a number of the armed republican groups had come together under the banner of the ‘IRA’] has had something to do with it?
- Perhaps they are meeting [in their respective organisations] to discuss its implications?
- I take it there was also no change in the loyalist position regarding their unwillingness to attend?
- No. I had hoped to get a couple of Protestant community activists to come along in place of the loyalists, but their response was just as negative. They said that they didn’t want to sit down with ‘certain people’ in case what they said was subsequently reported on one of the internet blogs.
- It is ironic that the very ones they objected to are not actually here today.
- It’s a real pity. I always feel that when you’re in a face-to-face discussion things can be teased out more honestly and productively. Do you think the loyalists might come and meet face-to-face with us at some stage in the future?
- I would like to think so.
- I suppose I can understand their fear. If one of these groups was to release a statement saying that they had been talking to people from the Protestant or loyalist community, you can see why Protestants would be fearful if their names came out. People in their own community mightn’t like it.
- It was also because some of the Protestant community activists who I approached simply don’t trust certain republicans. Trust has to be built up first.
- With certain elements, yes, but most of us sitting here *have* been working with loyalists over recent years and there has never been a problem. Unfortunately, the reality is that it’s not the ones you *are* talking to who you need to be talking to, it’s the ones you *won’t* talk to who you need to be talking to.
- Some of the loyalists would even question the value of talking. For example, in relation to the Ardoyne [parading] situation their feeling is that certain republicans

just don't want *any* 'Orange feet' on the Ardoyne Road, no matter how many concessions Protestants might make, or hoops they might jump through.

- Yes, there's some truth in that.
- The problem is also to do with how they view each other. Take that incident outside the church†. Not only the sectarian song, but the bandsmen attacking the guy who filmed it on his mobile phone. That incident is going to create massive problems down the line, because those in Ardoyne, and surrounding areas, who do not want Orangemen marching down that road are going to use that in regard to future marches.
- And the bus coming back early from the 'Field'††. . . them getting off the bus at the top of the Shankill, marching past Ardoyne, then getting back on the bus to return to the Field. It was ridiculous! The truth is that it's not that the Orangemen *want* to walk, it's that they feel they *have* to walk. And the basic problem is that the Orange Order is anti-Catholic. I was talking to people in our own organisation and saying that I had problems with the idea that we should talk to the Orange Order. I don't think that we should be talking to fascists and bigots; why would you want to talk to people like that?
- One Protestant I was speaking to accepted that it was a terrible own-goal for the Orange Order, but he added that, like any organisation, the Order embraced both the good and the bad, but unfortunately people will remember that incident outside the church and not the fact that, say, in Crumlin the bands, as a mark of respect, stopped playing while going past a house where a child had died. He said that the positive things get lost when anything negative happens.
- That's hardly a good example of positive Orangeism. It is a tradition here, on all sides, that bands fall silent going past a house in mourning. Furthermore, because the Orangemen insisted on marching through Crumlin, and despite the fact that they came to a local agreement, the so-called dissidents are recruiting heavily because of it. What I am hearing coming out of Crumlin is frightening. They are up there actively recruiting young people, and that Orange parade made it so much easier for them to do that.
- People want the most discontented elements on both sides to come together and talk. But there's not a chance of that. Even those among them who *might* want to talk are afraid of the backwoodsmen behind them. We should be looking for some other way of doing it. Somebody has to think of a *new* way of explaining, and talking and bringing people on board. As for that band: a bunch of f___ing

† During 2012's 'Twelfth' Orange celebrations there was a delay as bands were proceeding into the centre of Belfast. A loyalist band was filmed as it walked in circles outside St. Patrick's Catholic Church playing music while onlookers sang anti-Catholic words to one particular tune.

†† A large field outside Belfast where the city's Orange lodges gather on the 'Twelfth' [of July], to partake of refreshments and listen to religious and political speeches.

loopers! Unfortunately, that's the face of Orangeism that the people in Ardoyne will see and remember. Pressure should be put on the Orange Order to explain why they allow such bands to participate in their parades.

- Someone said recently that an Orange march isn't an Orange march unless it has got Catholics to annoy. I saw an article about Glengormley and not only did the Orangemen march through the 'village', but the route took them past every Catholic, nationalist area in Glengormely.
- The Orange Order was created as an anti-Catholic organisation. They try to dress it up as a 'cultural' organisation, but it can only be seen as cultural in rural areas, not in city areas. But the debate has to open up, and the redundancy of Orangeism has to be discussed. And it *is* a redundant concept. If your daughter marries a Catholic you're turfed out of the organisation: surely that must be illegal!
- Seemingly it's not. The laws of discrimination don't apply in the same way to religious organisations.
- Could we all step back a bit and look at what is being said here: 'The Orange Order is a fascist organisation' . . . 'Orangeism is a redundant concept' . . . some bandmen are 'loopers' . . . Now, one of the main fears expressed in the loyalist document is that if there ever was a united Ireland different aspects of Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist culture would be sidelined, denigrated or simply got rid off. And, in a sense, the attitudes and sentiments expressed here regarding the Orange Order would only serve to reinforce that fear. *Irrespective* of whatever republicans might believe lies at the core of Orangeism, the fact is that it exists, and those Protestants who would want to bring it with them into a united Ireland would not be able to do so if the prevailing attitude was that they were fascists, or loopers, or people adhering to a redundant concept.
- Orangeism should be an irrelevance and that is what it will eventually become.
- But, if progressive republicans like yourselves feel like that – and all of you are currently engaging with loyalists and unionists – what can they expect from other, less sympathetic republicans?
- Sometimes you just have to accept that what you are doing is wrong. The white government in South Africa finally had to stand up and say, 'We were wrong.' The Orange Order has to do the same. But there is no sign that they will ever do that. They still come out with this 'we have a right to march anywhere' stuff. Well, imagine if *we* said: okay, we agree with you, you can march wherever and whenever you want, but we expect the same rights to be accorded to us – we want

People want the most discontented elements on both sides to come together and talk. But there's not a chance of that. Somebody has to think of a new way of talking and bringing people on board.

to hold a republican march up the Shankill, and we'll be carrying banners to our dead. I think that's an approach we maybe need to take. To show the foolishness of what they're asking.

- Is that not just falling back into the old trap of territoriality? One of the questions I was asked to bring to this meeting relates to the republican protest against a beacon being lit on the Cave Hill as part of the Queen's jubilee celebrations: given that the protest was held in the name of the United Irishmen, were any loyalist organisations approached to take part in it?

- No. Not as far as I am aware.

- Or even non-paramilitary Protestant organisations?

- No, I don't think so.

- That's where the contradiction lies. What these loyalists were saying to me was that, even though nationalist republicans were supposedly protecting the memory of the Protestant radicals who created the United Irish movement, no organisation representing today's Protestant community was asked to participate.

- No doubt loyalists would have refused to participate anyway, for the same reason that they're not willing to sit down with us today. But, you're right, we do need to see if there are ways we can approach such things in a more inclusive manner. Especially with the different commemorations coming up over the next few years.

- Maybe we should *all* just give up on protests, parades and commemorations. [UDA leader] Jackie McDonald recently said the same thing about Orange marches as I used to say about Easter parades. I hated them. They ended up more trouble than they were worth. Provo supporters deliberately created trouble at any of our commemorations. After their own parade had ended, rather than dispersing they remained at the side of the road until we came past and then jeered at us or threw paint-bombs. I personally would have been happy to abandon the whole thing. I'm sure many loyalist paramilitaries find the Twelfth a real hassle, because the whole onus is placed on them to stop people doing this or doing that. McDonald just happened to voice honest concerns. But given the reaction he got from other Unionists it was like saying he hated God.

- I work on different interface initiatives with loyalists who marshal some of the parades, and I know it's a difficult enough job. And I fully accept that – certainly for the ones I work with – for them it's not about goading Catholics, or triumphalism; they are genuinely there to try and stop any trouble arising.

- Not only that, but their interface efforts are all largely voluntary. It is them who go out at two in the morning and not the paid workers. There's a lot of groups out there getting well paid but who are not delivering. Many of the funded organisations are operating 9-to-5 jobs, but when you need people out

on the ground at midnight on a Friday or a Saturday it usually ends up that it is the unpaid people who are out doing the work, trying to get the kids back off the streets, or separate rival crowds. There are things like that happening in this community and nobody wants to talk about it openly.

- I have been told that some Protestant residents as well aren't happy about Orange marches going past *their* houses, for it just brings trouble down upon their areas.

- This whole concept of marching is something which is going to have to be looked at.

- Yes, it's like a throw-back to the past, something that belongs to a different era. The military uniforms and the marching bands, and all that.

- It is so territorial: each side claiming 'we own this bit of land'. You're right. It is outdated; it's a relic from the past.

This whole concept of marching is something which is going to have to be looked at. . . It is so territorial: each side claiming 'we own this bit of land'. It is outdated; it's a relic from the past.

- Could we get back to the purpose of today's discussion? Our focus is meant to be on how republicans might engage productively with Protestants and loyalists. After the 'Loyalist comments' section had been compiled I was asked by some of the loyalists what reaction there had been. I told them that a full discussion had still to take place but that a few republicans had felt some of the comments were more progressive than they had expected. And one loyalist responded, in words to this effect: 'Look, people think loyalists are all Neanderthals. But we are like everyone else: we talk, we discuss, we explore new ideas. We could have sat down with you and talked about how the f___ing IRA did this or did that, but you had asked specific questions [how has the republican message been received by loyalists, and what did they believe republicans should do to promote that message?], and we tried to engage productively. But we can do that now because the war is over – aside from the dissident threat – and we feel more able to come out of the trenches.'

- I suppose *we* are not being all that productive ourselves today. We came here to discuss those loyalist comments yet we have focused mostly on Orange marches.

- They're right, we *all* need to engage productively. Tackle difficult topics head on. Difficult for both sides.

- Like their support for the monarchy. I remember asking some loyalists why they supported an outdated institution like the monarchy and they replied that if they didn't they could be seen as anti-British. And I said that some of the greatest patriots who came out of Britain were anti-monarchists. Like the ones who started

off the trade unions, and did all sorts of progressive stuff. You can be an anti-monarchist and still be totally British. There are plenty of British republicans.

- I am reading a book about the life of Charles Dickens. Apparently Queen Victoria came along, on two occasions, to attend his readings. She asked to meet him and he said he couldn't as he was a republican. He refused twice! And Dickens is a giant within British culture.

- We need to ask loyalists: why would you want to be loyal to a Union which is keeping you in a situation of social and economic neglect? Why would you constantly support that connection?

- But one loyalist made the point – which appeared in an earlier pamphlet – that, as far as most Protestants are concerned, staying within the UK is far better for working-class interests than going in with the Republic. Certainly not at the moment when the economy down South is in meltdown. Loyalists would claim that, from a *class* perspective, it is the Catholic working class who are deluded.

- Yes, there are contradictions. I know people in the North who see themselves as staunch republicans and vote for Sinn Féin. But if there was a referendum on a united Ireland they would vote against it. You might get a surprise result if, just before people cast their vote for a united Ireland, they were told: you will pay to visit the doctor, you will pay to visit a hospital, you will pay for this and that, unemployment is high, there is no housing benefit, no DLA. . . You're right; the reality is that if we went into a united Ireland tomorrow it would result in real hardship for many people.

You're right; the reality is that if we went into a united Ireland tomorrow it would result in real hardship for many people.

- So it isn't only loyalists and unionists who have hard questions to answer, it is us as well.

- The Six-Counties joining the 26-Counties holds no attraction to me, unless we could radically change the social and economic system in the process. But that radical change is not on the horizon. And most working-class people are more concerned about their everyday needs than about some nebulous 'united Ireland'. Sinn Féin's vote is up, not because they are seen to be leading us to a united Ireland but because they seem to be fighting better for people's everyday needs. I mean, republicans might talk a lot about a 'united Ireland', but few of us have presented a realistic vision of what it might actually look like, or how it might function.

- A loyalist made an interesting comment to me the other day. He said the irony is that the dissident campaign can only assist the two parties the dissidents hate the most – the DUP and Sinn Féin. Either way, one of those two parties will be the winner. If armed actions serve to prevent any real movement towards a united

Ireland then the winners will be the DUP, who will have been able to maintain the Union even longer than they thought they would. If, on the other hand, there *is* a move towards a united Ireland, the dissidents are not known to the public so no-one would vote them into any new government – people are going to vote for Sinn Féin.

- I agree. Any resumption of an armed campaign is completely illogical. Purely emotional.
- I am not sure if it can simply be called emotional. If you look at the leadership of some of these organisations – and that’s why it is unfortunate that those other groups are not represented here today – there are people who I would see as solid and genuine republicans. My experience on the ground, however, leads me to question the quality of some of the people they have allowed into their ranks, and their motivations for getting involved. There are some people there who I know were criminals all their lives, and about five years ago joined one of these groups, and you’re left asking: why would a so-called republican group want these people in their ranks? People who caused so much havoc in their communities. They were housebreakers, joyriders, thieves... and now they’re being allowed to run around under some sort of republican banner? There is no respect for them from other republicans, and also from within the community.
- And some of these organisations shoot kids who are engaging in anti-social behaviour and think that’s going to make them popular. They think it will bring them support. But what type of support do they want? ‘Oh, we shot him for you, will you now hold guns for us?’ I know that in our communities people *do not want guns* in their houses. Those days are gone, people no longer see a need to hide a gun under a bed. People are frightened; they don’t want them. I know from experience: during the INLA decommissioning there was a widespread sigh of relief when stuff was being taken out of people’s homes.
- I have been observing these ex-Provo groups which *aren’t* attached to violent organisations. They break away from the Provos and form their own organisations. But very soon they are faced with the dilemma: what do we do now? And all the time the Provos are criticising them: ‘Youse are all just dissidents. You support armed actions.’ They’re left in a limbo. And that’s because at the moment there is no alternative. There is no left-wing, or centrist, or republican/nationalist alternative. If you want to be political you go with Sinn Féin; if you want to be violent you go with the dissidents. The majority of people are somewhere in the middle and there is no platform for them at the minute.
- What would fill that vacuum? Would it be a radical, non-violent republicanism?
- Yes. I think so.
- I think éirígí is trying to do that . . . come out with a left-wing alternative.

- Although I don't support them, I was hopeful they would develop an alternative to Sinn Féin and open up new possibilities. And if they can get a councillor next time in Upper Falls, things might develop from there.
- What people like ourselves have to say to all these groups is: look, it is quite acceptable to be non-violent and be a republican, there is a role there. But they think: oh, you're either a sell-out republican or a militant republican. We have to convince them that there is something else, that there is another type of republicanism. And that's what some of us are attempting here with this.
- One last question from the loyalists was: Irish republicanism seems incapable of embracing Britishness – is that because the *Irish* component is seen as more important than the *republican* component?
- Nationality is an accident of birth. If you care about a country you really care about its people and you want to make their living conditions the best that you can. When people say to me 'I'm proud to be Irish', I ask 'Why?' People wear their patriotism with pride but don't know exactly why they're wearing it. Nationalism sucks. At best it creates division, at its worst it creates concentration camps. The thinking behind any nationalism is that I am better than you because you are of a different nationality.
- Someone once pointed out that *nationalism* is often destructive of *nationality*, in the sense that nationalism strives for an often artificial unity while nationality can be multi-faceted. For example, when the academic elite in the new Irish state set out to formalise the Irish language and provide schools with a standardised grammar it largely ignored the Ulster Gaelic of Donegal. The actual process of forging a single national, political entity can often undermine the rich diversity which exists within a country and among its people or peoples.
- That's true. I was working in London with a bloke from the Outer Hebrides, and because my people are from the Gaeltacht I got talking to him about language. I asked him if he listened to *Raidió na Gaeltachta*? And he said, 'No, it's an Irish station.' I said, 'No, it's a Gaelic station.' He said, 'It's not. If that was a truly Gaelic station it would encompass us in the Highlands and Islands as well, but it doesn't, it's only for those who are Irish. And I'm Gaelic, not Irish.'
- People's identity here is still deeply embedded into our politics. No matter what we might have in common, our perceived Irishness or Britishness always acts as an obstacle to our coming together. We need to find ways of overcoming that barrier.
- But to go back to what you said: that's an interesting point about republicanism without the Irishness. That would be a good topic for debate: the concept of republicanism without its Irish connotations.

Appendix

Protestant Irish nationalists

(a Wikipedia article)

Irish nationalism has been chiefly associated with Roman Catholics. However, Protestants were also influential supporters of political independence and leaders of national movements. Despite their relatively small numbers, key events such as the 1798 rebellion, the influence of the constitutional Parliamentary Party from 1886, and the 1916 Easter Rising would not have developed as they did without Protestant involvement.

Pre-Union background

In the 18th century the first attempt towards a form of Irish home rule under the British Crown was led by the Irish Patriot Party in the 1770s and 1780s, inspired by **Henry Grattan**.

The Age of Revolution inspired Protestants such as **Wolfe Tone**, **Thomas Russell**, **Henry Joy McCracken**, **William Orr**, **Lord Edward Fitzgerald**, the **Sheares** brothers, **Archibald Hamilton Rowan**, **Valentine Lawless**, and others who led the United Irishmen movement. At its first meeting on October 14, 1791, all attendees, apart from Tone and Russell (both Anglicans) were Presbyterians. Presbyterians such as McCracken, **James Napper Tandy**, and **Samuel Neilson** would later go on to lead Protestant and Catholic rebels in the United Irish Rebellion of 1798. Tone did manage to unite if only for a short time, at least, some Protestants, Catholics and Dissenters under the “common name of Irishmen”, and would later try to get French support for the rising.

Though the United Irish movement was supported by individual priests, the Roman Catholic hierarchy was opposed to it. In Antrim and Down the rebels were almost all Presbyterians, and at the Battle of Ballynahinch the local Defenders decided not to take part. After the initial battles in County Kildare the rebels holding out in the Bog of Allen were led by **William Aylmer**. In County Wexford, which remained out of British control for a month, the main planner and leader was **Bagenal Harvey**. **Joseph Holt** led the rebels in County Wicklow. Only in Mayo, where there were few Protestants, was the rebellion led entirely by Catholics, and it only developed because of the landing by a French force under General Humbert. The disarming of Ulster saw several hundred Protestants tortured, executed and imprisoned for their United Irish sympathies. The rebellion became the main reason for the Act of Union passed in 1800.

1803 and 1848

In 1803 there was another rebellion led by **Robert Emmet**, brother of **Thomas Addis Emmet**. He was joined by other Protestants such as **James Hope** and was later executed for his part in the rising. In the 1840s **Thomas Davis**, the revolutionary writer and poet, and **John Mitchel** were involved in the radical politics of their day, and **William Smith O'Brien** led the rebellion in 1848.

The democratic and non-violent Repeal Association led by Daniel O'Connell in the 1830s and 1840s was supported by a number of Protestants; the most eminent being **Sir John Gray**, who later supported **Butt** and **Parnell** (see below), and others such as **James Haughton**.

Home Rule era (1870-1914)

The new Home Government Association was founded in 1870 by **Isaac Butt**, who died in 1873. **William Shaw** presided over the convention held to found its successor, the Home Rule League of which he was chairman. He was followed by **Charles Stewart Parnell** founder of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Parnell led the Gladstonian constitutionalist Home Rule movement and for a time dominated Irish and British affairs. Several Protestant figures in the early Northern Ireland Labour Party were nationalists. These included MPs **Jack Beattie**, **Sam Kyle** and **William McMullen**, and labour leaders **James Baird** and **John Hanna**. Meanwhile, trade unionist **Victor Halley** was a member of the Socialist Republican Party.

Artists

While not active nationalist supporters, authors who wrote about Irish life and history, such as **William Wilde**, **Whitley Stokes**, **Standish James O'Grady** and **Samuel Ferguson** helped to develop nationalist sentiment.

From 1897 the artist and mystic **George Russell** (also known as "Æ") helped **Horace Plunkett** to run the Irish Agricultural Organisational Society. The IAOS rapidly grew into the main Irish rural co-operative body through which Irish farmers could buy and sell goods at the best price. Plunkett's home in County Dublin was later burned down in 1922 by anti-treaty Irish republicans during the Irish Civil War, as he had been appointed a Senator in the first Irish Free State Senate.

Russell was also involved in the 'Irish Literary Revival' (or 'Celtic Twilight') artistic movement, which provided an intellectual and artistic aspect supportive of Irish nationalism. This was also largely started and run by Protestants such as **WB Yeats**, **Lady Gregory**, **Sean O'Casey** and **JM Synge**, who also founded the influential but controversial Abbey Theatre that opened in 1904. 'An Túr Gloine' (The Glass Tower) had a similar membership.

Independence era (1916-22)

Sam Maguire recruited Michael Collins into the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1909. From 1928 the main prize for Irish football awarded by the Gaelic Athletic Association has been the Sam Maguire Cup.

In 1908 **Bulmer Hobson** and **Constance Markievicz** founded the Fianna Éireann, intended as a nationalist boy scout movement. The Irish Volunteers were established in 1913 by Irish Nationalists and separatists including **Roger Casement**, Bulmer Hobson and **Robert Erskine Childers**, all Protestant Irish nationalists.

The Irish Citizen Army existed from 1913–1947 and one of its creators was **Jack White** from Ulster, son of General George White. On Easter Monday, April 24, 1916, 220 of the group (including 28 women) took part in the Easter Rising. Most of the rifles and ammunition used in the Rising had been imported from Germany in July 1914 by Robert Erskine Childers on his yacht *Asgard* along with **Edward Conor Marshall O'Brien** and assisted by **Alice Stopford Green** and the former Quaker Bulmer Hobson. The rest of the rifles were shipped by **Sir Thomas Myles**, at the suggestion of the barrister **James Meredith**, and were landed at Kilcoole. In 1913 Hobson had sworn Patrick Pearse into the IRB. A prominent signatory to the Anglo-Irish Treaty in late 1921 which followed the Anglo-Irish war was **Robert Barton**, a cousin of Childers.

The archetypal work of art which commemorated the 1916 Rising, though sculpted five years before the rising, is the statue of the dying mythical warrior Cúchulainn, sculpted by **Oliver Sheppard**, a Protestant art lecturer in Dublin and moderate nationalist. Cast in bronze, it was unveiled at the GPO in Dublin in 1935.

In the subsequent Irish Free State governments **Ernest Blythe**, a former member of the Irish Volunteers, held various ministerial posts. **Seán Lester** was a League of Nations diplomat. The founder of the Gaelic League and first President of Ireland was **Douglas Hyde**. Some like the **Revd. Robert Hilliard** fought in the Spanish Civil War.

