

# **A process of analysis**

## **(3) Searching for a road map**

*Compiled by Michael Hall*

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The Project wishes to thank all those who participated  
in the discussions and interviews from which this publication was compiled  
(see page 4 for list of names)

This is an edited account of the *third* phase of a three-phase initiative.

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# Introduction

As the rationale behind this initiative has been more fully described in the two preceding Island Pamphlets, it will be just summarised here.

The initiative is loosely based on John W. Burton's approach to conflict resolution: namely, that conflict resolution (as opposed to conflict management, conflict transformation or conflict reduction) requires a process, not of negotiation or compromise, but of *assisted self-analysis*, in which the parties to the conflict are hopefully brought to an understanding that what they are facing is a *shared problem*.

Accordingly, two discussion groups were convened – one representing a range of political and grassroots opinion within the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community, the other representing a similar range within the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community. These two groups were, separately, engaged in a process of analysis, to determine whether, as a result of that analysis, they could begin to view the generations-old Northern Ireland conflict as a '*shared problem*'.

The participants were asked four basic questions: (1) What did they feel lay at the root of the conflict? (2) What were *their* community's core goals and aspirations? (3) Had they considered the possibility that some of the strategies employed to advance those core aspirations might actually serve to undermine them? And finally: (4) Could they envisage sitting down with their opposite numbers (in this case the members of the other discussion group) on the basis that what they were all confronting was, in reality, a '*shared problem*'?

The discussions undertaken by the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist [PUL] grouping were summarised in Island Pamphlet No. 107. The discussions undertaken by the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican [CNR] grouping were summarised in Island Pamphlet No. 108.

(Both can be downloaded as pdfs from <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/islandpublications>)

Both groupings were then reconvened – again, separately at first – in preparation for the final stage. This involved engaging them in a new series of discussions centred around a second set of questions: (1) Did they believe our conflict could be approached as a '*shared problem*'? (2) If so, in what possible ways could they collectively address this problem? (3) Specifically, what could each community do *for the other*, so as to engender movement towards conflict resolution and move the situation towards a '*win/win*' outcome? (4) Finally: who was willing to engage in a *joint* discussion?

Perhaps not unexpectedly, the process was at times difficult to keep on track. For a start, it was hard to prevent some of the discussants from reverting back to an *analysis* of the causes of the conflict – something which, they were reminded, had already been undertaken in the previous series of discussions – and focus on *how they might move forward*, and what was required – from both communities – to enable this to happen.

Nevertheless, many positive suggestions did begin to emerge from the discussions. Readers will be left to judge for themselves, however, whether they feel the overall outcome of the process has been productive and worthwhile.

*This third pamphlet is divided into five sections:*

- (1) An edited summary of the reconvened discussion involving the PUL grouping.
- (2) An edited summary of the discussion & interviews involving the CNR grouping.
- (3) An edited summary of a *joint* exploration on the theme: ‘Where to now?’
- (4) A list of suggestions made which might be useful when it comes to setting down what one participant called ‘*a road map*’ to the future.
- (5) Overview.

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

*The following individuals were involved in the series of discussions and interviews from which the material for the three pamphlets was compiled.*

**PUL representatives**

- Dr Ian Adamson**
- Fraser Agnew**
- Charlene Anderson**
- Isaac Andrews**
- May Blood**
- Sammy Douglas MLA**
- David Hagan**
- Jackie Hewitt**
- Raymond Lavery**
- James Magee**
- David McCrea**
- Jackie McDonald**
- Dr Chris McGimpsey**
- Barney McCaughey**
- Ian McLoughlin**
- George Newell**
- Teena Patrick**
- Brian Watson**

**CNR representatives**

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

# Searching for a road map

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## (1) Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist discussion

- *As one of the participants in the CNR group said, “An end to the conflict is only the beginning; we need to take things to the next stage.” So, we are here to explore what that next stage might be. Can we approach our conflict as a ‘shared problem’, and, if so, what can each community do to assist the other to move forward?*
- Move forward? I think you’re being very optimistic – for a number of reasons. First of all, how do you begin to move forward when some republicans are openly encouraging a return to violence?† Secondly, the politicians up at Stormont have shown themselves incapable of anything constructive. Thirdly, is it realistic to ask people at the grassroots to work on these issues when the community sector is being decimated? Look how many projects are going to the wall because of lack of funding. And, anyway, have the funders any vision? Take the fact that the Community Relations Council wouldn’t support [*Phase 2 of*] this initiative of yours – because they decided that it didn’t represent ‘best value’! Are they living in the real world?
- I think too many people are expecting grassroots people to move us all forward. Government has an obligation to do it – after all, that’s what we elect them for.
- There’s a major issue there, because *our* politicians, honestly, are not interested in the loyalist community, whereas Sinn Féin will pursue everything for their people. The unionist parties ignore our needs, whereas Sinn Féin are totally behind their people, will support them, will support inquiries, help them get funding. My issue with the Stormont House Agreement was that there was nobody in there negotiating on behalf of working-class Protestants. And until that changes, until there is people from this community involved in any talks about our future, we’re stuck.
- *How could you change that then?*
- The only way is if somebody steps forward, someone who we can all support, someone from a community background, somebody who is for community regeneration, education, whatever... someone we can all trust. Until our politicians get a bloody nose they will always be where they are.

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† Reference to a leading dissident republican who was arrested because of comments he made during a speech at an Easter commemoration in Belfast.

- I think there is no point waiting for politicians to come knocking on our door. They are not interested, they are all middle class, they don't understand or experience the human impact – which is still being felt because of the loss, because of ex-service personnel still living with the backdraft of the conflict, still looking under their cars for bombs. I think the only way to do that is to get involved in politics from a grassroots level. Hopefully, next year I might stand for the PUP, and it'll be my bugbear to be shouting for inquiries into murders and atrocities during the conflict, no matter who was involved in them, and start a campaign to have more trauma centres, facilities where it doesn't matter who you are coming in through the door to tell your story. The human story is not being fully told. And I'm talking about both communities – for loss is loss. Having said that, there *is* a real need to look into atrocities carried out against the Protestant community, because inquiries into murders don't happen in our community – nobody is interested. For me, we can only move forward when there is a proper recognition for *all* victims, and there is some kind of trauma centre where people who have lost family members get the support they deserve.
- Catholic victims are not really served well in all this either. All these 'rights' bodies, supposedly speaking on behalf of Catholic people, are only using them: they're more interested in talking about the evils of the British government, and how *their* community suffered – totally ignoring the fact that the IRA were responsible for the majority of victims during the Troubles.†
- The nationalist side talk about 'moving forward' but yet they go back to the Famine. They make it appear that England was only ever bad news for Irish people; they totally ignore the many tens of thousands of Irish people who made a good life in England. *Our* politicians harp on about the flag and royalty, and the Shinners go back to the 'Black and Tans' and the Famine – and all this gets us absolutely nowhere.
- The other problem we have is that loyalist communities are suppressed now, let's not hedge about the thing. I know it is happening in nationalist areas as well, with the dissidents. Loyalist areas are still oppressed by our own people. There are criminal gangs here and drug gangs there: it's not about loyalism any more – it's about gangsters. I am forty years in the organisation and I know what I see around me. When you get people knocking on your door and asking: "Can you help me? My granny has to pay £500 to a certain drug dealer..." We have *that* to try and clear up first before we talk about housing, about equal rights, about a lot of other issues.

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† Of the 3,700 deaths attributed to The Troubles, republicans were responsible for approximately 60%, loyalists 30%, and the security forces 10%. It is estimated that 107,000 people suffered some physical injury. On the basis of data gathered by the NI Statistics and Research Agency, the Victims Commission estimate that the conflict resulted in 500,000 'victims' – victims being defined as those directly affected by bereavement, physical injury or trauma. (*Source*: Wikipedia)

- There is such a sense of hopelessness, of alienation, within the Protestant community that I really fear for the future. Young people especially are totally pessimistic about their community's future, about their *own* future.

- *But how do you feel all that could be counteracted?*

- For a start it needs unionist politicians to sit down with community workers, and be open and honest – for once in their lives – and say: how can we work with each other, regardless of what went on in the past? Is there a way forward in which we can fight for people's needs together?

- I can accept everything that people are saying here but I'd like to maybe approach it from a different angle. I used to be involved in helping people make changes within organisations. And a lot of it was about having a vision of the future: If we got what we all wanted, what would it look like, could we describe it? And if that's where we want to get to, what are the first few steps to take us there? What could we do to make a start, to build up confidence and trust, to enable us to slowly move forward? Rather than having a big master plan – Stormont House Agreement, or whatever – with everything worked out. That doesn't work for us obviously. Now, after reading both [the preceding] pamphlets, it seemed to me there *was* some common ground: basically it's about our children and grandchildren living in some form of decent society where everyone is treated with respect. Could the two groups begin to build up that picture, their vision of the future?

***Could we begin to build up a vision of the future: If we got what we all wanted, what would it look like, could we describe it?***

- Three or four years ago things looked more positive and people felt there were things we *could* work on. Michael, you yourself had us in this very room with people from *An Eochair* and *Teach na Failte*, and we were talking about the need for people from both communities to stand up and talk about regeneration, better education, our common needs; even somebody who would stand for election who we could all vote for on working-class issues. And the nationalist ones said straightaway: yes, that would be great, but Sinn Féin would wreck it within their communities. As soon as they got wind of anything like that they would jump in to undermine it, demonise everyone involved, and claim that they were 'anti-peace process'. If they couldn't control it they would seek to destroy it. You have that guy Gerry Carroll, standing as 'People before Profits' – he done particularly well at the council election – but already republicans are demonising that young lad something shocking. And Nelson McCausland added his own demonising in his blog, labelling him a Trotskyite. And the people who are doing all this – demonising those who stand up for both communities – *are those in government*. It is government which is antagonistic to anyone coming forward who they see as a threat. So we can talk all we want about

trying to build relationships at a grassroots level – indeed, we are probably steps ahead of most of the ones up at Stormont – but unless the political parties change their attitude towards new grassroots voices then we may forget about it, for the only thing they are interested in – all of them – is holding on to power.

- I am leading the drive for Integrated Education but we are constantly blocked. Not by ordinary people, some 80% of whom support it, but by the ‘ones on the hill’.
- Politicians don’t want integrated education: they’re trying to promote ‘shared education’, but that is just another form of religious apartheid.
- A lot of people who support integrated education were actually involved in the conflict. They all send their children to integrated schools. But that is never picked up on by the media. Anyway, the media twist things. A poll was done in Highfield a few years ago about integration and 80% of the people said that they were happy where they were living. And when the media and some academics got hold of that they put it out that these people were sectarian! They weren’t – they knew their next door-neighbours, they knew where the local shops were, they were just content living where they were. But academics used the statistics to say: here is an estate that is totally sectarian and doesn’t want to move forward!
- This demonising is actually preventing people getting involved. Let’s be honest, paramilitary organisations did a lot of damage to communities, and many members of loyalist organisations are now wanting to give something back to their communities, but every time one of them steps forward they are demonised by the media, by Sinn Féin, by our politicians, even by people within their own community. It’s becoming harder and harder to get guys to engage; they say, “Why should I do this, I’ll end up having my face in the Sunday papers.” On the nationalist side it just does not happen. They’re allowed to have their past. In fact, they were ‘heroes’, they ‘fought the war’, and they will get all the support they need. And what must happen in *our* communities is that former combatants must be allowed to move forward.
- To my mind, the one pretty-well agreed sentiment in recent discussions is not wanting to see a return to the pain and suffering of the Troubles. Everyone wants future generations to grow up enjoying a peaceful and flourishing society. I wonder would it be possible to leave questions of Britishness and Irishness, and associated constitutional arrangements, to one side for the present and take this opportunity to build this fair and flourishing society? Could we focus on improving the quality of people’s everyday lives? Maybe if we could do that, and build trust in one another, then other, contentious issues might be easier to deal with. For a start I think we should invest heavily in Early Years provision, for a child’s experiences in the first few years of life have a huge influence on their subsequent life story. Similarly with education. Our present system imposes a sort of religious apartheid on young people growing up,

a division that persists into many aspects of adult life. Indeed, is it possible for a society that maintains such divisions to *ever* become fair and flourishing? I doubt it.

- I don't think it would be easy to just set aside identity-related issues. In hardline loyalist areas all I am hearing is: we feel left behind, we are losing our Britishness, losing our identity. And the Shinners know fine well that that is getting on our goat. Glengormley has a parade next Wednesday night and at the minute the Shinners have put in against it. All those things are happening. Michael asked how we might move forward, how we might change things. I honestly don't know. Change can't mean one identity being left behind.

- See your question about us having a 'shared problem'? Our community fears for its culture and identity. But Sinn Féin is driving that fear – they are instrumental in *sustaining* the problem. They repeatedly call for 'reconciliation' and Declan Kearney talks about 'uncomfortable conversations', but Sinn Féin *don't offer anything purposeful* into that conversation except high-sounding platitudes. They're not giving anything away – so it's a one-sided conversation. And as D\_\_\_ has just said, there's yet another parade they're coming out in protest against. If they *really* want to see change, they would need to look at *themselves* and ask how *they* need to change as part of it all. There needs to be an 'uncomfortable conversation' *internally* within the republican movement, about their role in all of this.

***Sinn Féin talks about 'uncomfortable conversations', but that conversation also needs to take place internally within the republican movement.***

- 'Shared problem?' There was too much emphasis from the very start on 'cross-community'. Now, I have been very heavily involved in cross-community work for years. But there was far too much funding directed that way, with often nothing purposeful coming out of it. A lot of young people were taken away on trips, but there were no issues dealt with. As soon as they were dropped home again they went straight back to the interface causing more trouble. I believe a lot of the funding should have been put into building relationships *within* communities, to *prepare* them for a purposeful cross-community engagement.

- We brought together a group of Protestant kids to explore their history: we gave them talks on Ulster history, Irish history, the Somme; we even took them to Dublin. I went to Newtownabbey councillors looking for more funding. Oh no, they said, we can't support that, you will have to work with a similar group from the Catholic side before you can get funding! Funders devalue 'single identity' work.

- Do any politicians ever get asked: how many cross-community meetings have *you* attended recently?

- Another thing: somewhere along the line there is going to have to be a new relationship with the media and the press. Over the Easter weekend you had a very, very small incident which took place at St Matthews Chapel; it was a *non*-incident. By Monday morning it was on every radio programme, in every paper. Now, that *same* weekend we had republicans in paramilitary dress and balaclavas, we had them walking the streets with weapons, we had a leading dissident encouraging people to join the IRA and go back to armed conflict – yet there wasn't one thing of that the press run with. There is definitely an agenda. If a loyalist mural goes up in Carrickfergus or East Belfast, it will be on the news for three weeks. Yet when republicans put a mural up in Ardoyne – of the guy with the rocker launcher who tried to murder police officers in Twaddell Avenue three months back – it wasn't even on the news! There is definitely an agenda by the media to demonise our community.

- *But, to return to our purpose here: what could you do about all that?*

- Whenever you respond to any request to go on the media they want you to be arguing about Catholics or this or that. That's no use. We want to talk about our communities, and how we can go forward, but they're not interested in that. Even when you try to talk about social issues you know they're just waiting to say: "Well, what about the paramilitaries in your area, are they not doing this and that...?" They continually try to get away from the subject you want to talk about – the bread and butter issues, housing, social problems – because they have no interest in all that.

***The media are not interested in us talking about our communities, or how we can go forward – they want us to be arguing about Catholics.***

- There was a big change happened on this road, regarding the Workman Avenue gate, and it involved quite a lot of work. We took the militarised gate down and replaced it with a community gate. We asked the DoJ [Dept. of Justice]: "What media have you got planned for this?" And they said, "Nothing, there is an election on; the politicians would be too busy." And I said, "But this isn't about politicians, this is about residents." Such a big change and it wasn't deemed worthy of any media coverage. But see the first brick that comes over it, there'll be media crawling all over the place.

- *Can I throw in another question here: one put to me by a member of the CNR discussion group. He acknowledged that nationalists/republicans need to be asked where Protestants and unionists fit in with their vision of a new Ireland. But he also wanted a similar question to be asked of you: 'Where do Catholics and their cultural expression fit in with the unionist/loyalist vision of the future?'*

- At the present moment there is equal recognition of both traditions, that is the fundamental plank of the Assembly: equal recognition. We keep hearing about a shared future. Ten years ago you wouldn't have seen anybody walking around Belfast

in a GAA shirt, but now it's acceptable. They even walk through Sandy Row and nobody blinks an eyelid. There's people walking up through Andersonstown wearing Linfield tops. That wasn't possible a few years ago. There *is* a change of attitude slowly coming in. It just hasn't impacted on everything.

- Nationalists have their representation in government, in the legal system, and in everything else. Personally I don't see their quibbles about where 'we' see their role in Northern Ireland: they are fully part of the government at Stormont – what more of an acceptance could there be? A more pertinent question is: where do they see *me* as an Ulsterman? I have no problem with Irish culture, but do they respect *my* culture?
- I am happy in my own identity and am not looking to be offended. And that's the difference. Some nationalists are actually *looking* to be offended.
- It has got to the stage where many Protestants don't even look forward to the Twelfth. I would just love to enjoy myself on the Twelfth. I haven't had a drink on the Eleventh or Twelfth night in over fifteen years, because I'm standing at interfaces until 3 or 4 in the morning working with people, trying to keep things calm. But if you're standing near the parade on the Twelfth republicans will take a photo of you and post it on social media, and say, "Look at that loyalist standing there." They don't see, or care about, all the other work you might have been doing to keep the peace.
- Some years ago I was asked where I stood on an all-Ireland, and I said: "I am a democrat, and if the people of Northern Ireland vote for an all-Ireland I will accept that vote – but I will still wake up the next morning as a Protestant." And I don't think Protestants say that often enough; it's as if we are scared to say that we're Protestants and nobody can ever take that away from us.
- I agree. There are Catholics live next door to me, and there are several others in the street. Do they feel their identity is challenged or in jeopardy because they live in a community that is mainly Protestant? No, they don't; they still practise their faith, they still go and visit their friends on the other side of the peace wall. In fact, I would drive them to the Novena. Am I afraid of their religion? No, I'm not. If there was a United Ireland tomorrow, would I be afraid of that? No, I don't think I would. Because it is not going to change me as a person; it's not going to change where I worship, it's not going to change my family, because I will still be doing the things that I do. So no, I wouldn't have any fear of it either.
- But we need to sit down and have that discussion within our communities. Because it's the fear factor which is unsettling people.
- I *would* fear a United Ireland. The political establishment in the Republic turned a blind eye to republican terrorism in Northern Ireland, they gave shelter to murderers, they protected them. And it was *only* since Sinn Féin began to gain increasing support down south that the politicians there are now demonising them! Now, don't get me

wrong: I have great friends down South, and go down regularly – and my ancestry not only includes Catholics but people from the South – but the fact is that I do not trust the political establishment down there. Nor for that matter do I trust the British government. They have a policy of sanitising republicanism and demonising loyalism. The media hone in on every fault that loyalism shows, and totally ignores the faults being shown by republicanism. Tony Blair, the prime minister – gangster and war criminal – ignored the judiciary, ignored parliamentary procedure, ignored everything, and he himself – ‘King Blair’ – started to hand out Royal Pardons which even the royals knew nothing about, and ‘on-the-run’ letters and all the rest of it.

- But the South don’t want the North. We go down regularly and have discussions, and there is no way people there want a United Ireland.
- A united Ireland is a complete non-starter. I agree with others – a united Ireland doesn’t scare me, but it is still a primary concern within our communities. We have kids growing up now who feel their role will be to resist a united Ireland.
- It depends on which kids you are talking to. There is a new generation of young people working alongside Catholics and the discussion has changed. If you’re talking to kids who are on flag protests or on parades, then, yes, that is the discussion you’re having: “There will never be a united Ireland; I wouldn’t even talk to a Catholic!” But if you are talking to kids who are given the opportunity to mix with Catholics – and I’m not talking about middle-class kids, I’m talking about kids from Ballysillan, Woodvale, Shankill – they are saying: things need to change here, would a united Ireland be really that different for me? They don’t think it would be.
- Our politicians should tell people the benefits of being in the United Kingdom. It’s more than a flag, it’s more than the National Anthem, it’s more than the Royal Family – there are real benefits to belonging to the United Kingdom. When you put those benefits to people I am convinced there will never be a united Ireland.
- *What type of steps could both communities take to move us all forward?*
- Regarding your question about accepting one another’s cultural traditions: Now, a band forum in Londonderry took the opportunity, rightly or wrongly, to make a presentation at the recent Sinn Féin Ard Fheis. They thought it was the right thing to do, and Sinn Féin were putting out the hand of friendship to them. Two weeks later the Sinn Féin Minister for Culture withdrew all their funding!
- We have an important election coming up, and Sinn Féin might become the largest group in the Assembly. If we think things are difficult now, what’s it going to be like if that happens?
- You can only work with someone who is a willing partner. Realistically, you are asking people to work with people who don’t even want you, who don’t even recognise your country!

- There is no middle ground. People still vote on the ‘Orange and Green’ card.
- Fifteen years ago David Ervine and Dawn Purvis did a great educational document, and the PUP put it out. And what did the DUP do? They rubbished it, because they saw the PUP successfully confronting a cross-community issue. Five years ago that same document came back up and it was the best thing since sliced bread.
- They done the same with the *Common Sense* document when it came out. They ignored it – and yet much of *it* surfaced again in the Good Friday Agreement.
- Mainstream unionists never wanted to see people in working-class communities – like the PUP, or the UDP under McMichael – getting into politics; they think that’s *their* preserve. And we’re never going to get anywhere while that mentality remains.
- Maybe that is something that we could *all* agree on where it needs to change. Two years ago when the Equality Commission and other quangos were being set up, we had a meeting with the politicians up at Stormont and said there is an opportunity here to get community people from our areas, who have good practice and have been involved for years, onto these bodies. They agreed with us. But did it happen? No, of course it didn’t.
- Twenty years ago they agreed to a Civic Forum and where is it?
- People concentrate a lot on the young, and certainly that’s where a lot of the work needs to be done. But the conversation also needs to involve the adults. See the people of Cherryvalley and the Malone Road – many of them were more sectarian than people in our areas were during the conflict. They might not have been so vocal about it but believe you me they were. And somebody needs to tackle this LAD [loyalistsagainstdemocracy] social media stuff. It is absolutely disgraceful to poke fun continuously at the educational under-achievement within the unionist working-class community, absolutely disgraceful. And it is being run by people from within the universities.
- When I look at the political parties I always ask myself: are they actually committed to change? Are they committed to working together? I don’t think they are. And if that desire to work together is not there, then unless we change Stormont we’re stuck, we’re going to be here for another thirty years. Stormont is completely wrong. It was set up on an Orange and Green basis, and unless that changes we’re stuck.

***When I look at the political parties I always ask myself: are they actually committed to change? I don’t think they are. Stormont was set up on an Orange and Green basis, and unless that changes we’re stuck.***

## (2) Catholic/Nationalist/Republican discussion

*(incorporating some individual interviews)*

• *I am putting the same questions to both groupings: Can we approach our conflict as a ‘shared problem’? If so, what can each community do to assist the other to move forward? And what might the next stage be?*

• I’ll tell you what both sides could do for starters – more specifically, what the political parties could do: admit to what has been agreed in the Good Friday Agreement. All parties in Stormont have agreed that there will be no constitutional change here unless a majority votes for it. They should now get on with proper politics until that happens. The Good Friday Agreement is *seventeen years old* and we don’t seem any closer to confronting our fundamental divisions. There’s no coming together of minds, no preparedness to set aside old antagonisms. In many ways we are all still fighting the Troubles – but without the violence. Both sides have to develop a new realism. The irony is that despite professing to be staunch exponents of Britishness or Irishness, both sides are out of step with the massive changes which have taken place in those identities.

***The Good Friday Agreement is seventeen years old [yet] in many ways we are all still fighting the Troubles – but without the***

• Would the South really want a disaffected minority, nursing their grievances for decades as happened in the North? Anyway, sometimes I think a United Ireland among Catholics is like Heaven: everybody wants to go there, but not just yet.

• The PUL community talk about the working class being badly affected by the cuts and this new rampant capitalism, and then they turn around and say: what’s wrong with us is that we haven’t got a single Unionist voice. And one unified voice for unionism leads to the presumption that nationalists too should have one unified voice. And if that’s the case then we should just forget about politics and count how many Protestants and Catholics are on each side. Indeed, that’s what’s happening.†

• Take the flag issue... I think Protestants/unionists fail to understand the mindset of nationalists. As a child the only dealings I had with the City Hall was going down to pay the gas bill. And it was completely alien to me and everybody from my community. All the monuments, all the statues, were seen as symbols of victories

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† When contesting the UK General Election (2015) the DUP and the UUP entered into a ‘Unionist pact’ which some denounced as a ‘sectarian headcount’. Then Sinn Féin’s Gerry Kelly produced an election leaflet directly appealing to the Catholic vote, by focusing on the fact that Catholics, according to the 2011 Census, now outnumbered Protestants in North Belfast.

over our community: the victory of Britishness over Irishness, of Protestantism over Catholicism. We felt cowed down by the system and its symbols. The City Hall had nothing to do with us. The people in the dole office treated us shabbily. I think the Protestant/unionist community assumed that before the Troubles we had bought into all that, but we hadn't, we still felt completely alienated. I mean, Queen Victoria seemed to be everywhere: her statue was prominent in the City Hall grounds, there was another statue outside the Royal [Victoria Hospital]... we noticed all these things even as children. In fact, even though the Royal was right in our midst we never thought it was 'our' hospital – it was 'their' hospital but we used it. And that takes a lot to get over. So minor things like changing rules on flags and other things shouldn't make Unionists fear. If anything, they should welcome it. They shouldn't see it as a sign that Catholics are trying to take over and supplant Britishness with Irishness, but that Catholics are finally being made more comfortable here.

- But moving towards one another doesn't suit the politicians. The politicians would then have to start thinking about *normal* politics. For even within parties you would have left and right divisions over economic issues and other matters – so best to avoid these things, and focus on the sectarian divide, it's so much easier.
- I think that at the beginning of the Troubles the republican leadership and the activists thought they were fighting for a United Ireland whereas the majority of the nationalist population were fighting for political equality. And a lot of Catholics/nationalists are satisfied now with what they have.
- There is all this talk about a 'peace dividend'. All I expected from peace was peace – I don't know what people expected beyond that. Capitalism will create jobs if it needs to create jobs – capitalism *won't* create jobs out of some sense of altruism, as a reward for working-class people because they have now stopped fighting one another. To me, peace should have allowed us to get into proper politics which would *then* have allowed us to fight politically for a better society for working-class people.
- Protestants and loyalists need to come to people in the Catholic community and tell them what their fears are, face to face. We need somewhere to debate and address our fears, as well as work for our children's future.
- I know how hard it is for people to change from things they have been brought up in. My own family have been involved in the IRA since it was formed, and have been in jail in every generation since then. I often asked myself how did we [the Official IRA] cut sectarianism completely out of our organisation. I realised that we were able to replace a narrow nationalism with socialism, which we believed to be a far superior concept. So, you can't just stop people thinking a certain way, they need to be offered *something better*. We need to have a *vision* of what would be best for people, something they could give loyalty to. And, in our own case, it might not require absolute loyalty to the governing system but to *society itself*.

- There should be an open-door meeting place, an *active citizenship forum*, where people could debate and discuss, and indeed, be *invited* in to engage with others.
  - I think we should dive in at the deep end – no more pussy-footing about. For example, I was impressed by the pamphlet you did on Protestant bands, and what I would suggest would be to bring two bands together – one from each community – in a joint project. Get them talking about their role in their communities; share the history of their respective bands; talk about their instruments, the music they like best. And if they were up for it, they could maybe perform together. Things like that might help to break down the barriers that exist, the misperceptions we have of one another.
  - Protestants/unionists/loyalists proclaim that they would ‘die’ for their heritage: and to most of them that is represented by four things: the Union, the Queen, the flag, and their Britishness. But what if the future brings drastic changes? Say Scotland breaks up the Union. That in turn would mean the end of the present Union flag, and would undoubtedly impact on the very nature of ‘Britishness’. And say a mood of republicanism was to sweep England and end the monarchy – what would Northern Irish Protestants do? Commit mass suicide? Hardly. They might be shocked and dismayed, but they will do what everyone else would do – they will adapt and get on with their lives. And they will feel themselves to be *every bit the same people* as they were the day before such cataclysmic events. Do you think that the vast majority of people down South are going about bemoaning the loss of the Six-Counties, acting as if they have lost a limb? Not a bit of it! They just get on with their lives. In fact, most of them now would have no real desire to see that severed limb reconnected: it would cause too much trouble, it could infect the main body, best leave it as it is. People adapt. And unionists and loyalists will have to adapt to whatever the future holds, just as nationalists and republicans will have to adapt.
  - I remember being at a community event and during lunch I was seated beside a well-known loyalist. And for twenty minutes he gave me his analysis of what Sinn Féin was doing to his community. Finally, I said to him: “You know, I just wish you people could direct the *same* energy and effort – which you have so effectively put into your analysis of what Sinn Féin are doing – into analysing *how we could all move forward*.” Both sides constantly say why things *can’t* be done – I just wish that people would start telling us what *can* be done, and *when* they will start to do it.
- Both sides constantly say why things can’t be done – I just wish that people would start telling us what can be done and when they will start to do it.***
- You hear all this fine-sounding rhetoric – from all sides – about ‘the need for reconciliation’. But what we need is *a road map*, describing a *process* of engagement which might take us towards reconciliation. And there will be no point

to it all if unionists *or* nationalists go into such an engagement simply with the intention of ‘besting’ the other side, convinced of the righteousness of their own cause. Both sides need to engage with one another in a spirit of compromise, of appreciation for one another’s aspirations, and with a willingness to meet each other half-way.

- I worry that so much grassroots experience is being lost. Community workers today don’t realise what was done in the seventies and eighties – all the radical ideas which we once tried to translate into action: food co-ops, a people’s bank, moves towards creating a form of grassroots participatory democracy.... Do you remember you did a series of pamphlets some years ago in which you let a dozen community activists recount their experiences? I can recall the younger workers in our project reading them in amazement: one of them said to me, “I never knew all that stuff went on.” It’s as if we have to keep reinventing the wheel; all the accumulated grassroots experience is being lost, and there is little there to help motivate people on the ground, overcome current feelings of powerlessness. I think we need to remind people about that story, tell them that things *can* be achieved.

- Many people, loyalists and other republicans, continually criticise Sinn Féin. But Sinn Féin has moved further than all the other parties to the conflict – and has brought most of its membership with it. The mainstream Unionist parties have been afraid to do that; they have still to confront the nay-sayers within Unionism. And Sinn Féin constantly holds out the hand of friendship to the Protestant community. Unionists and loyalists repeatedly paint Sinn Féin’s stance on marches and the Union flag as being motivated by a desire to undermine their identity. It has nothing to do with that, it is motivated by the need to see the nationalist community treated with respect and their culture accorded equality.

- Loyalists claim that it is only their community which is demonised by the media. But just look at the invective that has been directed against Gerry Adams in recent years – it is relentless; the media and politicians – north and south – never miss an opportunity to take a swipe at him. The media down south especially constantly try to put it about that he is a liability to Sinn Féin. Absolute rubbish! Gerry Adams is Sinn Féin’s leader because Sinn Féin party members *want* him to be their leader.

- We need to expose our young people to all sorts of arguments, different opinions. Do you see that crowd of young lads standing across the road there, opposite our office? How do we impact on them? They smoke dope every day, because they have nothing else to do. When you’re talking to them, they’re saying: “Nobody gives a f\_\_k about us. We’ve no community centre: the ‘RA’ blew it up and then they built a memorial garden in its place.” Beechmount Leisure Centre too went to the wall, and the Catholic church only opens its youth club one night a week, but you’ll not get in unless you’re one of the ‘good’ kids. And they stand there at that shop, maybe twenty/thirty strong

every Friday night. Individually, when you are talking to them they are all good kids, but they have f\_\_k all of a future. Those lads look up to the big drug dealers and their fancy cars and big houses in Carryduff. I warned them that once you go down the criminal path, you get in deeper and deeper, and the harder it is to break away. I told them to watch that RTE drama series *Love/Hate*, for it portrayed the ruthless side of drug dealing. I try to warn those young glads that even if they only do one criminal act and end up with a criminal record, that's their future job prospects gone. And no-one wants to know them. When taxi-drivers pass them they comment: "Look at those wasters!" And that crowd of young people are replicated right across this city, in every area. But what is everyone's attention focused on? Flags and parades! It's crazy!

- You're asking us whether we could see things as a 'shared problem'? I'll tell you who has *no trouble whatsoever* seeing things from a 'shared' perspective – criminals. There is no sectarianism in crime. There's criminals from the Shankill who work with criminals from the Falls; they always did. They do robberies in one area and pass the stuff to the 'other side' to sell it. They all met each other in Millisle, Rathgael, Hydebank, Crumlin Road and Magilligan. They were doubled up in cells together. They have no politics – money is their only God.

- I have sat down with loyalists who told me how much they distrusted the Orange Order and Unionist politicians, and yet the next minute you see them standing side by side with them! I will respect people who are what they are, and are consistent in what they say and do, whether I agree with them or not. The only answer is for people in working-class areas – whether the Shankill, Rathcoole, the Falls or Andytown – to have a socialist alternative. We have to overcome that old nationalism, whether Irish nationalism or British nationalism. To be honest, I would do away with both the Tricolour and Union Jack – my flag is the red flag, the flag of the working class.

- I feel really despondent when I think about the future. And although I despair about *both* communities, my greatest disappointment is with the Protestant community. I mean – as one of the participants in your PUL pamphlet pointed out – these are the people whose forefathers were to the forefront of the American Revolution; who produced such remarkable individuals as Henry Joy and Mary Ann McCracken. The radical Presbyterians who did so much to ensure the survival of Irish music and the Irish language. And not forgetting, of course, the United Irishmen. I always believed that the Protestant community was capable of so much more. But they seem now to be a people so inward-looking, so burdened with their current problems, that they can't rise about it all – all that former creativity is long gone. And they are continually looking for some saviour, some great leader. To be honest, I despair at the dearth of any real vision in *either* community.

- I think *both* communities have to confront their sectarianism, their self-righteousness. Whenever I hear Catholics condemning Protestants for acting

‘superior’ or ‘supremacist’ I am reminded of an old Dave Allen joke: This Protestant dies and goes to Heaven. He is welcomed at the Pearly Gates by an angel, who offers to show him around. The angel points to different groups of people relaxing around a large green. “Just in front of you,” says the angel, “are the Presbyterians. Over to your right are the Methodists. And just beside those trees are the Anglicans.” But while the angel is explaining all this, the newcomer’s attention is fixed on a massive, twelve-foot-high wall just beside them. “What on earth is that for!” he exclaims. “Quiet! Keep your voice down!” whispers the angel. “Why?” “Because behind that wall are the Catholics – and they think they’re the only ones here.”

• I think we *can* see our conflict as a ‘shared problem’, and I think it *is* possible to help one another move forward. In our organisation we have done something similar to the process you are currently involved in. For example, we undertook an extensive consultation on parading. We did a stakeholder analysis, looked at ‘where we are now’, at ‘where we want to be’, and then developed a ‘pathway to actions’. This process helps identify all of the problems, where possible provide solutions, and then moves on to the implementation of these solutions, one at a time. We broke each problem down. For example, with regard to one particular parade, we analysed all of the communication difficulties which existed between the parties involved. To combat some of these difficulties we had written agreements between the police, republicans and loyalists. And we asked observers to report if these were breached. After the third year we didn’t need written agreements because trust had been built up as participants kept to their word. So it was about taking the whole thing apart into its different components and trying to deal with *each* through an action plan.

We have to get people beyond this constant complaining – and it happens on both sides – about how they have been victimised. We all have to live in the *now*, and say to one another: “Right, what are we going to do to make relationships better?” And in *our* work the questions we pose are no different from yours, in that we say to the nationalist groups: what can *you* do to improve relationships with the unionist community, and we say to the unionist groups: what can *you* do to improve relationships with the nationalist community? Now, invariably both sides will say: “What do you mean, what could *we* do? Sure, *they*’re the problem.” And we say: “No, no: what can *you* do?” And that can be the beginning of some genuine soul-searching. In conflict we are all often very good at saying what the other side should do, but not what we ourselves should do to improve any given situation.

***Now, invariably both sides will say: “What do you mean, what could we do? Sure they’re the problem.” And we say: “No, no: what can you do?”***

In saying all that, the community sector *has* delivered. For example, in the late nineties there were problems with communication, and misunderstandings on the

ground, so mobile phone networks were set up. When young people were causing problems at the interfaces, many community groups involved them in diversionary activities. And take the very difficult issue of policing... Many groups have been involved in commendable work around the whole issue of policing. Our own organisation in 2006-2009 delivered somewhere in the region of fifteen trust-building processes, and action plans for each district command unit, involving the PSNI, republicans and loyalists. I believe that that process fundamentally changed the relationship between the nationalist community and the police.

Now, how might such an approach impact on the impasse at Twaddell? It is evident that Twaddell is a very difficult and complex situation. Perhaps one possible way to assist would be to get a group of key players from both the nationalist side and the unionist side, and put them – to begin with – in two separate rooms, and then try to help each group identify what *they* could do to improve relationships. Now, no doubt they would each go through the usual, “Well, they [the Orangemen] just need to leave us alone,” or “They [the protesters] just need to let us up the road.” But you say to them, “No, that’s what *they* should do – what should *you* do?” And it might take a long time but you have to persist, and, who knows, if people *did* rise to that challenge, you could maybe see new possibilities being opened up.

- In August 1969 I got involved in relief work on behalf of people made homeless by the upsurge in inter-communal violence. I also went ‘across the barricades’ and made contact with Protestants, to see what we could do to confront the situation. This work eventually brought me to the attention of Maurice Hayes, who was heading up the new Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission (not to be confused with the current Community Relations *Council* whose primary focus is on ‘reconciliation’, whereas the Commission was largely focused on ‘community development’), which had been set up by Harold Wilson’s Labour government. Hayes invited me to work for the Commission and I became its first fieldworker. Hayes also brought in John Wear Burton from London University to assist me. Burton held that conflict resolution (as opposed to conflict management, conflict transformation or conflict reduction) requires a *process*, not of negotiation or compromise, but of *assisted self-analysis*, in which the parties to the conflict are brought to an understanding that what they are facing is a *shared problem*. Burton also believed that for a process of conflict resolution to have any realistic chance of success, it had to involve the parties at the extremes, for only through them could you get sight of the depth of the conflict, and only through their direct engagement would it be possible to engender movement towards resolution.

Burton’s approach struck an immediate chord with me in regard to the work I was engaged in. For although many seek to ascribe the ‘cause’ of the Northern Ireland conflict to different factors – class, poverty, criminality, terrorism, etc. – there is no doubt that at its core lie deeply-held, identity-related needs. One of his ideas which

I was drawn to was that of getting people into a situation where, with the help of a third party, they could clarify their objectives and then determine whether or not the manner in which they were pursuing those objectives was self-defeating. I watched while Burton guided Billy McMillen and leading members of the Official Republican movement through an analysis of their position during which they acknowledged the self-defeating nature of military action, in particular the alienation of Protestants from Republican ideals. The Official IRA declared a ceasefire soon afterwards.

Burton and I also organised a highly-significant conflict resolution workshop in Holland, engaging representatives of the UDA, UVF, Official IRA, Provisional IRA, and the Red Hand Commandos, along with non-paramilitary community representatives. Even today, some of the original participants still talk of the hopes that were engendered, and their lasting regret that the process couldn't have been sustained and developed further. But it was not to be. The Community Relations Commission was wound up by the power-sharing Executive set up in 1974 as a product of the Sunningdale Agreement. The Executive clearly didn't see the importance of the work the Commission was doing on the ground. Indeed, they didn't even think it was *necessary* now that the Executive was in existence. They somehow imagined that if unionists and nationalists could work together in government – in the form of the UUP and SDLP – then that was all that was required. However, although such optimism proved to be completely misplaced and the Executive collapsed in the wake of the Ulster Workers Strike, the Commission was not resurrected.

After the collapse of the 1974 power-sharing Executive, I felt that the British government perhaps regretted the absence of the Commission, because they supported me, through non-governmental agencies, in the establishment of the Northern Ireland Community Development Centre, based in the same office on Belfast's Antrim Road used by the Commission. There was a wealth of individuals who came through its door and engaged in direct dialogue with one another: clergymen, paramilitary leaders, community workers, academics, local politicians and others. And this was at a time when violence was still ongoing. Eventually the funding dried up and it had to close, but I believe that there is a vital need for government to fund a similar office today: with its main objectives an open-door policy for facilitating dialogue and debate, and to preparing briefings on contentious issues for the Stormont Assembly.

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### (3) A joint discussion: ‘Where to now?’

(The final session involved participants drawn from both the PUL and CNR discussion groups.)

- *The purpose of this meeting is to ask ourselves: where, if anywhere, can we go now?*
  - You’ve posed a difficult question. With regard to *my* community, loyalism is going from one crisis to the next. I mean, how is loyalism going to deal with republicans celebrating the Easter Rising next year, especially if there is a massive parade to the City Hall with Tricolours everywhere? Imagine how loyalism is going to be affected by that, especially when 390 ‘on-the-run’ letters were given to republicans to keep them out of jail while loyalists are being threatened with new supergrass trials. Republicans are getting a bye-ball, but loyalists are to be hammered – that seems to be the reality. If loyalist leaders are arrested there will be mayhem. So how can we be positive about the future when these things are hanging over our heads?
  - Matters are also complicated big time by the failure to renew funding to many ex-prisoner-run projects. The funding for the ‘Prison to Peace’ initiative at least gave us the opportunity to do things together. Now that’s been taken away.
  - From the republican perspective I would echo that concern. With the demise of that initiative people will drift apart and begin to think less of what they heard at those meetings and more about what they’re hearing in their own areas. And our interaction was very powerful at times. At the very beginning when you went to a meeting you could feel the tension in the room, but as the discussions progressed many of those tensions were resolved. I think it will be highly detrimental if that opportunity to engage with one another is lost, especially if a crisis does arise in the next year or so.
  - I agree. We started off as strangers. It was an uncomfortable zone for many people, but we eventually began to appreciate each other. People can huddle together in their own wee groups and get worked up about what they perceive the ‘other’ community is doing to ‘their’ community. But when you sit down *together* you begin to see how contentious issues are seen by the other community, how *they* view it. People are locked into a siege mentality. That’s why we have to continue to talk to one another, stop the dehumanising we all did of the ‘other side’, and try to move on *together*.
- We have to continue to talk to one another, stop the dehumanising we all did of the ‘other side’, and try to move on together.***
- In ‘Prison to Peace’ we were getting people to meet and understand one another. We

were going into schools and youth clubs and talking to people. S\_\_\_ was in Taughmonagh Social Club giving a talk on the Connaught Rangers, and what pleased me was that this mate of mine – who once told me that his mother and father “brought me up to hate Fenians, so I just hate them!” – was away over to S\_\_\_ afterwards, talking about the similarities and the way things used to be. So it *does* work. But if we’re not speaking together God knows what will happen.

- In the ‘Prison to Peace’, it wasn’t just the meetings: each group had an office and someone on the end of a phone who could facilitate things. At our office on the Falls Road loyalists could walk in and out unannounced. But it’s closed now, so that’s gone.
- *Can that conversation not still take place without funding? What about a monthly get-together, to debate different issues?*
- Look, whenever the five groups [representing UDA, UVF, PIRA, OIRA and INLA ex-prisoners] got together at the start, government would have sent helicopters and limousines just to get us into the same room, but when they thought the war was definitely over they wouldn’t have given us our bus-fare. And that’s where it’s at: the job’s done, the war’s over, we don’t need you lot any more. Sixty-three people who were employed through ‘Prison to Peace’ are now having to look for other work. One of my colleagues has done more cross-community work than anybody I know. But he’s now completely out of the equation: last week he was cleaning fridges in Tescos and is starting a new job with Asda. Many people, myself included, who were constantly engaged at cross-community work, are now having to look elsewhere. And it’s the same on both sides. You ask could we do it for nothing? Much as I would like to do it, I will no longer be used and abused. Our own community has abused us, saying that we sold out by talking to republicans; our politicians used and abused us for years; and now we are to be abused by the powers-that-be, who see us as surplus to requirements. In fact, I think we’re actually needed now more than ever.
- We have all stuck our necks out and taken risks and now they think they don’t need us any more. Yet no doubt if things fall apart they’ll come running to us pleading: can you help us out here?
- We know that with all the austerity measures and people getting paid off everywhere, and with victims calling – deservedly – for pensions, that it is embarrassing to government to be seen giving money to ex-prisoners. But many of us have moved on: we are no longer simply ‘ex-prisoners’: we are engaged in community development work, cross-community projects, cultural initiatives. It’s the government and politicians who keep us in this box labelled ‘ex-prisoners’.
- We accept that we created the atmosphere of violence here, but we also helped create the atmosphere for peace; we gave the politicians room to try to find political solutions, and now they want to marginalise us. That would be acceptable if the

politicians were up to the task. But they are clearly not. And if things turn bad, and people at the grassroots have stopped engaging – or the resources to allow them to do so in a purposeful manner are not there – then there could be big problems ahead.

- *But if people at the grassroots stop talking, where else will it take place? As you said, there is no purposeful dialogue taking place between the politicians.*

- They're a laughing stock!

- I personally think Stormont is a beaten docket.

- I watched *Stormont Today* last night and there was a debate on education. But the chamber had less than 20 MLAs present. This was about the *future of our children* and that's all who will bother turning up for such an important debate – out of 108! I think the whole thing is eventually going to collapse under the weight of its own pointlessness; it is completely irrelevant.

- When what we term the 'peace process' first gained momentum it seemed to be all-embracing and to include the politicians, especially with the euphoria surrounding the 'all-party talks' and finally the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Most people, believing that the 'peace process' and the 'political process' were one and the same, then took a back seat, assuming that the politicians would continue the drive towards peace. But that was a grave misreading of the situation, for the reality is that the 'peace process' and the 'political process' were always *two separate entities*. And with the grassroots taking a back seat – indeed, being sidelined by the politicians – 'the peace process' lost all its former momentum. We delude ourselves if we believe that the political parties at Stormont are there to further the 'peace' process; they are engaged in a *quite separate process* of their own, which, in many ways, is actively detrimental to movement towards a genuine peace.

***We delude ourselves if we believe that the political parties at Stormont are there to further the 'peace process'; they are engaged in a quite separate process of their own.***

- That's an interesting analysis. Maybe it's time we made that clear to people: that the political process should no longer be considered as the peace process.

- When the politicians were elected, they said: right, you lot go home, *we* know what has to be done. But they started by focusing on the lowest common denominator – sectarian denominator. On both sides. Some of us started a sort of community forum some years ago but people were saying to us: there's no need for this, the politicians will sort things out, sectarianism will fade away. Sensible people were saying that sectarianism would fade away! We were saying that it wouldn't.

- I think our assorted politicians would be afraid of a community-led forum.

- It's in the nature of all political parties to have that fear. We should be thinking way above such narrow, party interests – we should be open to all views.
- Take your pamphlets: the people I talk to find them invaluable. They had their own narrow perception of the other community and the pamphlets helped them to look beyond that, gave them a new insight. So the more people see stuff like that the better, and the more information we can get out to them... it is all about awareness.
- To me what makes the pamphlets different from other documents is the honesty that comes through from those who participate. That honesty is important.
- I think that part of the problem is the way in which language is used. Unionists look upon language as a science, nationalists seem to look upon it as an art form. I think that is why our politicians are always butting their heads together, because certain words they use have different meanings to either side. However, at *this* sort of level – grassroots discussions – people are using the *same* language, and you don't need a translator – and I think that's the strength of this sort of process.
- *If the talking is not taking place at Stormont, or at the grassroots, my fear is that negative perceptions and attitudes will only rigidify. To return to this idea of a Community Forum: could one not be set up, even without funding?*
- I think there *should* be a community forum; it is the only way forward.
- An old boss of mine used to say: “If it costs nothing, it's worth nothing.” We could have all the forums we like, but if the government or the powers-that-be don't have a stake in it then all it amounts to is a talking shop. Now, that in itself might have merit, but as far as the people upstairs are concerned it will probably be seen by them as having no value. They'll not take it seriously.
- If there *was* to be a community forum set up, could I suggest one of the first topics to be addressed? I have said this at previous discussions, but I think people should sit down and determine: what sort of society would we want to see here, in 5, 10, 20 years' time? What would it look like if we did come to an agreement and were able to work together? Could we have a shared education system; shared housing; and our different cultural celebrations being welcomed by *all* communities. Could we do that, could we envisage such a future, and determine what we need to do to get there?
- All of us sitting here know the value of cross-community engagement; we know how important it is. As an example, my own organisation has been working cross-community for years now in Suffolk [estate]. There's a band parade this Saturday and there'll be forty or fifty bands coming up Blacks Road and the Shinnars will steward the Woodburn side and we'll steward the estate. And if it wasn't for both sides co-operating that just wouldn't happen. That dialogue started ten years ago. If we don't have some association with each other, some appreciation of each other, other people will take over, and many of them won't want to talk to anybody.

- I worry about our young people. Firstly, they never directly experienced the terrible impact of violence on individuals, families and communities – unless they lost a family member or have a relative who is still suffering from injuries or trauma – so many of them won't appreciate just how bad it would be to go back to all that. Secondly, many of them have had no real exposure to the 'other' community, or confronted our differences the way we all had to. If you are kept away from the other community, people around you can tell you all sorts of rubbish about them – they're demons, they're devils – and you begin to believe it all.

- Irishness is changing. Britishness is changing. While others are moving forward, people here are stuck in their 1920s-style, out-of-date nationalisms. Especially our politicians. There are far more creative and forward-looking people *outside* politics than inside it.

- It is easy to blame the politicians for our entrenched attitudes. Yet I hear working-class unionists saying to politicians all the time: "We can't get past Ardoyne shops, what are you lot doing about it?" The pressure is coming from the bottom, not just the top. I ran an advice centre on the Shankill for years and no-one ever walked into that office and asked about identity issues, it was all social issues. Yet all our work on socio-economic issues counted for nothing when it came to voting: it followed the same old pattern.

- If the pressure *is* coming from the grassroots, and if the *root cause* of our conflict relates to identity-related fears, then we need to begin to seriously confront those fears. There is a new generation coming up who want to be 'the generation which saves Ulster' – armed with their flags and their carry-outs. We need to convince them that we can best protect our different cultural identities by building a new future together, rather than trying to regain a long-gone past.

- There *are* changes taking place – including down South, as was shown in the recent referendum on marriage. If we *could* facilitate a genuine debate we might be surprised at just how willing many people are to move towards a genuine accommodation.

- It will be a hard task. We have been fed negativity for so long it's now ingrained in our perceptions: if the other side is out celebrating then our side has to have a riot; if 'they' are seen to be winning, then 'we' must be losing. It is all opposites. Instead of looking at our commonalities.

- That's why we need to keep engaging with one another, understanding where we have all come from. We need to show people the progress this society *has* made. The other day I saw an old photo of the security barriers in the city centre. We have moved on so far from those days; we can't let it all slide back again.

***While others are moving forward, people here are stuck in their 1920s-style, out-of-date nationalisms. Especially our politicians.***

## (4) Ideas for a ‘road map’

(The following ideas and suggestions were voiced during the discussions and interviews conducted for all three phases of this initiative.)

### *From the PUL community:*

- Unionist politicians need to engage with community workers in working-class Protestant communities, to focus on people’s everyday needs.
- Grassroots and political representatives from the PUL community should sit down and develop a vision of where they want to be in three or five years’ time. In relation to the marching impasse that vision should endeavour to be constructive and imaginative.
- The media and politicians must stop demonising those from a loyalist paramilitary background who want to engage in community work.
- Research should be done by reputable agencies, regarding any perceived imbalances, and if both communities are suffering equally, then this must be clearly highlighted through the media.
- We need to be more creative and challenging. Organise public debates on themes such as: ‘Leaving aside flags and symbols, what does Britishness stand for in today’s world?’; or ‘Do we need so many marches?’ Invite Republicans to address themes such as: ‘What does Irish Nationalism have to offer people in the 21st century?’ or ‘Did moving from Civil Rights to Armed Struggle advance or set back the goal of a United Ireland?’
- The Parades Commission should publish the minutes of all meetings to prove that the Orange Order and bandsmen *have* made repeated and genuine attempts to engage with nationalist residents.
- There needs to be more honesty in our dealings with one another (whether at a party political or a grassroots level).
- The PUL community should be open to the reality that the concept of ‘Britishness’ is changing in today’s world and will undoubtedly change further.
- Change cannot mean one identity being left behind.
- The freedom to express and celebrate culture and identity must be protected, for *all* Northern Ireland’s communities. We should sit down and debate how our different identities can be celebrated without antagonising the ‘other’ community.
- We shouldn’t exaggerate threats to our cultural expression by a republican minority as reflecting the attitudes of the entire Catholic community.

- While both sides remain fixated by our divisive history we will never move forward. More emphasis could be placed on encouraging a cross-community ‘Northern Ireland’ identity. Furthermore, there is plenty of (historical and cultural) material which could be utilised to reveal the full extent of our *common* identity. We should take proactive steps towards building that common identity – taking young people on trips to local antiquities, etc.
- The PUL community must stop lamenting. Unionist politicians in particular must cease scare-mongering, and stop perpetuating their ‘second-class, losing-out’ depiction of the PUL community. These politicians must also develop constructive and creative strategies for protecting, and promoting, the British/ Unionist position.
- Unionist leaders should start to present a much broader and more positive picture of British values and the benefits of the Union.
- Unionist politicians should state publicly that the Union is secure, and highlight the positive aspects of the ‘peace process’.
- Unionist politicians should cease stoking fears of a United Ireland, given that there is unlikely to be one. They should focus their energies on building a more inclusive society within Northern Ireland.
- We need to get community people involved in all important decision-making committees, quangos, etc.
- Working-class loyalists need to have their voice better represented.
- There needs to be proper recognition for all victims and adequate support made available.
- If Sinn Féin really want to see change, they need to look at themselves and ask how *they* need to change as part of it all.
- Can we work towards a day when we might see people going forward for election on working-class issues? Maybe even with cross-community support?
- Those in government – including the DUP and Sinn Féin – should stop demonising or undermining emergent new voices, even if those voices are critical of them.
- Our politicians should be asked: how many cross-community meetings have *you* attended recently?
- A new relationship needs to be developed with the media; especially given the widespread belief that they have an agenda to demonise the Protestant/Unionist/ Loyalist community.

### ***From the CNR community:***

- An end to the conflict is only the first stage. The next is reconciliation. We have to sit down together and ask: how do we move things forward?
- When we sit down in cross-community meetings our Protestant counterparts should accept that *we* have the right to engage in justice campaigns, and we should accept that *they* should be able to do likewise.
- No unionist has ever spelled out to me where *my* community fits into their concept of what *they* would like to see for that future. There has not been that debate. And, likewise, where does someone from the Protestant community fit within *our* concept of a new Ireland? And who begins that conversation?
- We need to stop all this ‘single-identity’ work – it all needs to be done *jointly* now. If we want to look to our children, or our grandchildren – after all, we are *twenty years* into the ceasefires – *we need to be getting down to it*, as a matter of urgency.
- This nonsense about ‘your community is getting more than ours’ has to stop – socio-economic disadvantage is the same in *all* working-class areas. We also need to get away from this ‘everything you get, we must get’ attitude.
- We have to confront the many myths which have built up around Irish history. We also have to be more honest about what went on during the conflict.
- We should welcome challenging debates on all topics. Such as: ‘What would a new Ireland look like?’ ‘Did the use of violence get us any further forward than if we had pursued non-violent alternatives?’
- We need to begin to address difficult, divisive issues. And see what we can do *for one another* so as to enable both communities to move forward.
- Do we all strive for too much ‘purity’ in our respective ideals and aspirations? Do those aspirations have to be made more relevant to *today’s* needs?
- Why is the Catholic community not part of the Twelfth celebrations?
- All political parties should admit to what was agreed in the Good Friday Agreement.
- Keeping a military campaign going is a barrier to reunification. Try and convince people instead, develop ideas around what shape a United Ireland might take, start a debate. There will never be a ‘Declaration of Intent [to withdraw]’ but a [border] referendum is a good substitute. The 1916 Societies initiative ‘One Ireland/One Vote’ for an Ireland-wide referendum might be used to foster a proper debate.
- Unionists fail to understand the mindset of nationalists. Efforts to achieve ‘parity of esteem’ should not be seen as threatening by Unionists.

- If Unionists really wanted to secure the Union the greatest opportunity ever is now at their disposal – and that is for them to make the Catholic population feel equal citizens, with their traditions and cultural identity respected.
- The ex-combatant groups who put so much time and energy into securing the ceasefires and consolidating the peace should now ask themselves: ‘How can we help to take things to the *next* stage? What mechanisms, what processes, do we need to set in place? How do we confront any obstacles with the same determination with which we fought the war?’
- It has got to the situation where there is far too much talk for talk’s sake; we need to sit down and problem-solve. And it has to be a focused-type of conversation that leads somewhere. We have been talking for forty years and yet we have hardly moved on many contentious issues.
- Belfast City councillors only engage with one another across the chamber, and they are usually arguing. There is no interaction outside that, no informal meetings during which ideas and suggestions can be teased out and explored.
- We need a political forum which can provide the opportunity for an ongoing debate, which isn’t attached to either identity.
- ‘Uncomfortable conversations’? We need more than words, we need to see practical examples of what people will offer to the other tradition.
- Everybody is very good at saying what the other side should do, but not what *they themselves* should do.
- There needs to be a serious effort made over the Ardoyne impasse. People – on either side – should not be using the residents to consolidate their power-bases.
- In your bands pamphlet,† the bandmen paint a totally different picture of themselves than the one many nationalists see. I think CARA and GARC should give the marchers a chance to prove that they *can* walk past with dignity and showing respect. First of all, bring in a team of independent pollsters to conduct a survey of the people living along the route, asking them (in a confidential questionnaire) questions like: (1) Do you wish to see the march (both outwards and return) take place? (2) If it was to be conducted with dignity and respect, would you give it permission? If ‘yes’, then also bring in a team of independent monitors to observe the parade(s) and determine whether they felt the marchers did or did not treat the local community with dignity and respect.

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† *Towards a shared future (5): Ulster’s marching bands*, Island Pamphlet No. 105, available as a (free) pdf download from <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/islandpublications>

***From both groupings:***

- Even though the community sector over many years has developed the skills that are necessary to promote change, the sector is now in retreat and dangerously under-resourced.
- There is no coming-together among our politicians. The DUP and Sinn Féin need to come out publicly and give a commitment to positive change, and an end to ‘Orange and Green’ politics.
- We all need to be focused on the wellbeing of future generations.
- We need to focus on current socio-economic realities. Also, we must confront the damage being done by criminal and drug gangs.
- The political parties need to convene their own internal discussion groups, with all opinions encouraged. Then do the same on a cross-party basis.
- Can we start to paint a picture of what our future might look like? We need a practical *road map* to the future.
- The root cause of the conflict is sectarianism, and yet little is being done to tackle it in a purposeful way. Indeed, the Assembly itself seems to be a prime example of ‘Orange and Green’ sectarian politics in action.
- We need a new forum for debate, and preferably a centre where that debate can continuously take place, with an open-door policy.
- There is no real ‘peace process’; it is all ad hoc. Community representatives and politicians need to sit down and work out a structure, a process, whereby the suspicions of the past, held by *both* communities, can be explored and addressed. They should try to agree a workable timetable, with set goals.
- Get the media into a discussion with community activists regarding the media’s role and their responsibility in all this; even if it only alerts them to the damage they can cause, it might be worthwhile.
- Community organisations and associations are not optional extras, they are a vital part of community life and must be brought more into the decision-making processes.
- Political parties should be sent this pamphlet and asked to give feedback. Their responses could be published in a follow-up report.

## (5) Overview

Although many positive ideas and suggestions emanated from the discussions and interviews conducted in the course of this initiative, the overwhelming mood was one of despondency, with no consensus on how to progress our situation.

So where do we go from here? Joe Camplisson proposed (page 21) the re-establishment of a ‘Community Development Centre’ such as he operated in the early years of the Troubles. Although Joe himself is well into retirement age his commitment and passion remain undiminished and I know he would be willing to offer advice regarding the ethos and operating guidelines behind such an initiative. Furthermore, some of those who used to meet and debate in his Centre – from Fr. Des Wilson to Andy Tyrie – are still around to share their experiences.

Other participants stressed the need to establish an ongoing Community Forum where people of all backgrounds could engage one another in debate and dialogue.

Would government be willing to fund the administration of such a Forum? Surely it would be to the Stormont Assembly’s benefit that important and even contentious issues were being explored and debated by those most affected by them. The infrastructure is already there: both the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre and Farset International are willing to facilitate the discussions, Farset could host workshops/conferences, and *Island Pamphlets* could take the debate to a wider audience.

The Stormont Executive/Assembly could play a complementary but separate part. The political parties could establish a ‘Cross-Party Exploratory Group’, where individuals from all parties would come together on a regular basis to debate and explore ideas. (It could be agreed that any ideas expressed would not be binding on their respective parties, and, in return, those individuals would be permitted the freedom to be as imaginative and innovative as they wished.) If any of the emergent ideas contained new possibilities, they could be passed over to the Community Forum to be debated by grassroots activists – as a form of ‘testing the waters’ on behalf of the Executive. (A similar cross-party discussion group could also be created within Belfast City Council and elsewhere.)

We need to seriously engage with one another. Both communities also need to move away from seeing ‘the other’ as a monolithic block; indeed, we need to progress to a situation where labels such as ‘PUL’ and ‘CNR’ (such as I myself have used in these pamphlets) become increasingly inappropriate.

If we don’t debate our way to a new future, the current negative talking which is taking place could so easily take us back, step by step, to the dark days of the past.

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