

Reflections on Centenaries and Commemorations
(Discussion 7)

‘Common Sense’ (1987) revisited

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Keynote presentation

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wishes to thank

the keynote speaker **Colin Halliday**,
and all those who participated in the discussions

Sadly, one of the participants, **Frank McArdle**,
passed away just before this pamphlet was printed

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Introduction

The Fellowship of Messines Association was formed in May 2002 by a diverse group of individuals from Loyalist, Republican and other backgrounds, united in their realisation of the need to confront sectarianism in our society as a necessary means to realistic peace-building.

In 2020 the Association launched its ‘Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries’ programme. This programme comprised a series of discussions which were intended to create opportunities for participants, from various backgrounds and political viewpoints, to engage in discussion on some of the more significant historical events of 100 years and 50 years ago, the consequences of which all of us are still living with today.

The discussions also afforded an opportunity for those taking part to engage in the important process of challenging some of the myths and folklore associated with past events, by means of an open and respectful engagement with factual history.

In 2021, a further series of talks and discussions was initiated, focusing on the topic of *Partition and its Legacy*. Each event was to comprise a presentation by a well-known historian/community activist, followed by a wide-ranging discussion involving invited participants from a diverse range of backgrounds.

The discussion detailed in this pamphlet had as its focus a revisiting of the *Common Sense* document, published and distributed in 1987 by the NUPRG (New Ulster Political Research Group). The guest speaker was **Colin Halliday**, a community activist and current member of the UPRG.

Two presentations took place, one in Ballymena, the other in Belfast, and a thoughtful discussion took place at both events with invited participants.

Harry Donaghy, Project Manager, Fellowship of Messines Association

‘Common Sense’ (1987) Revisited

Colin Halliday

I would like to thank the Fellowship of Messines for inviting me to give a presentation here today. We don't often get invited to present the Loyalist perspective. I will be reading a paper which myself and Paul Clissold put together, which highlights some of the most pertinent points made in the 1987 *Common Sense* document, with reflections on its impact, both back then and, hopefully, for the future.

The document Common Sense (1987) as Futurist Manifesto – the parallels in 2021 are clear to see.

When the pamphlet/manifesto *Common Sense* was released in 1987 (it was slightly revised in 1993) the publication was greeted with indifference and in some cases outright hostility. For why should Loyalists have an opinion – that was the sole domain of politicians and the intelligentsia of the middle classes. *Common Sense* was seen as an intrusion, out of place with what was ‘expected’ of Loyalists (and indeed Loyalism as a grouping – up to that point there was negligible political commentary from Loyalists from within the working classes), so the publication was almost seen to be an anomaly. But if we now look back from our post-conflict 2021 position we can see that *Common Sense* was prescient, daring, problematic to the political establishment, and a ‘Futurist Manifesto’ that bears re-reading and close studying.

“We are all part of the problem but how many are prepared to be part of the settlement. It costs nothing to think about it.”

Almost immediately *Common Sense* accepts that we are all part of the problem but questions why we aren't all part of an agreed solution. Even today in 2021 we have a reluctance from so many people to reach out to be part of the solution instead of just steeping themselves in sectarian politics and refusing steadfastly to offer up alternatives and agreed solutions. Not much has really changed from 1987 to 2021 because many political parties (from all backgrounds) fail to grasp, and have consistently failed to grasp, the *Common Sense* concept of coming up with solutions that move away from the sectarian divide and offer up cross-community answers.

“In an attempt to create such a mechanism we propose the following: (a) Devolved legislative government for Northern Ireland and a written constitution. A set of constitutional laws, agreed by Ulster catholics and protestants together which would lay the foundations on which to build a new progressive democracy. An agreement instituted by Ulster people at referendum which can only be changed by Ulster people at referendum; (b) A modern democratic political structure based on consensus government, proportional representation and shared responsibility; (c) A Bill of Rights.”

In 1987 the idea of devolved legislation (and by extension devolved government, i.e. Stormont) was also seen as radical and somewhat unlikely. Yet here we are in 2021 and Stormont still stands, albeit on shaky foundations and with so much more to do. “Shared responsibility” has proved somewhat of a barrier and we still do not have a Bill of Rights, yet we can see from *Common Sense* that the desire was there in 1987 and it was a well-placed ambition.

Incredibly the document talks about “Unity in Diversity”. Yes, the word ‘diversity’ isn’t owned and copyrighted by the post-millennials but was introduced in *Common Sense* as a catalyst for change and the way forward for a divided society. We now see in 2021 what are now called ‘new communities’ living and excelling in Northern Ireland, so it is gratifying that the ideas expressed far back in 1987 hold so true today.

The section on government and electoral proposals are very much an almost carbon copy of what we now see in the Stormont Assembly. Elections every four (or five) years, the structure of government, the formula that sets up an Assembly – *Common Sense* signposted these political approaches almost to the letter. It clearly didn’t predict some of the pitfalls of Stormont (where one political party could bring everything tumbling down) and it certainly didn’t foresee scandals that allowed one political party to hold sway over the other and potentially use such sway as a form of bargaining chip. But it did call for, and hoped for, local solutions for local issues as it clearly realised that Westminster had no great understanding of the political nuances and tribal instincts of a Northern Ireland society that would have (and now has to a certain extent) to come out of a conflict and build a pluralistic peaceful society.

“Our proposals do not in any way deny any section of the community its aspirations. Any group which aspires to a united Ireland, an independent Ulster or any other constitutional change may achieve its objective if it commands a broad consensus of support for change.”

Even in 1987 *Common Sense* indicated that the aspirations of a community should be respected and achieved should a broad consensus support that change. The original idea of two-thirds majority seems somewhat dated now and in any democratic society it must be accepted that a '50% plus 1' majority would carry the day. But *Common Sense* did at least argue the point that everyone had a role to play in either copper-fastening the 'Union' through dialogue, or convincing society that a 'unification' was desirable should a majority think it appropriate. Already *Common Sense* was steering people away from conflict and back into politics and respect for diversity of viewpoints. This is to be acclaimed yet in 1987 it fell away so quickly without proper interrogation and acceptance.

“What we propose will probably be described by some as idealistic, ambitious, fraught with difficulties and even dangerous to attempt: but so then has anything that was ever worth doing. The most dangerous thing to do, and unfortunately the most politically popular, would be to do NOTHING.”

The idealism of *Common Sense* in 1987 now strikes us as completely rational. Ambitious it claimed to be, but it did tap into something that we now take for granted: a peaceful expression of ideas, acceptance of democratic rule, diversity as an ideal not a threat, and local government for the people. 34 years later we see these things as right and proper and taken for granted. It is the accepted norm now and something which we wish to build on, but *Common Sense* was there first and realised that solutions required an opening of the mind and a broader (much broader!) worldview.

Common Sense was by no means stunningly original nor so radical as to be laughed out of the place. Others had similar ideas and aspirations and that has to be acknowledged. But *Common Sense* placed itself within Loyalism and offered up their ideas as a way to overcome a violent past. This was new and this was a daring step forward.

“Ulster people may well find it strange that British political parties suggest that we turn away from sectarianism, yet refuse to provide organised alternatives for the Northern Ireland electorate.”

Inherent in this point is the obvious implication that *Common Sense* knew and understood that there were no real alternatives being put forward from a series of Westminster governments who were growing weary of the violence (happening within Northern Ireland and coming to the mainland) but had no concrete proposals or new initiatives that could heal the divide in a way that would command cross-

community support. Looking back now it seems that the British government was almost paralysed by inaction and perplexed as to what to do. *Common Sense* had this prescient belief that the solution had to come from within and not by the stroke of a pen from a British Government Minister.

“There is no section of this divided Ulster community which is totally innocent or indeed totally guilty, totally right or totally wrong. We all share the responsibility for creating the situation, either by deed or by acquiescence. Therefore we must share the responsibility for finding a settlement and then share the responsibility of maintaining good government.”

There was a sense even then (in 1987) that a collective acknowledgment of ‘fault’ (or blame or acceptance of responsibility) was needed to allow everyone to take ownership of the past. It is a remarkable admission and would have been seen then as something of a revelation. It was designed to inspire good governance based on mutual respect. Sadly not everyone saw this general admission as suitable and the ‘blame game’ continued. It still continues today. Whether it be through a peace and reconciliation committee or through a public enquiry, an acceptance of shared history (and therefore shared responsibility) might well still be considered as a way of moving forward.

We now can see *Common Sense* as a type of ‘Futurist Manifesto’ – a time capsule from the past that did offer actual solutions but were never enacted upon or debated until far later in the day. That may well be a shame but it does highlight the importance of listening to and accepting new ideas and initiatives that come from unlikely sources but which can provide an important step forward. From 1987 to even today now in 2021 we see various groupings pushing forward and using *Common Sense* as a type of template that may well help us all in society to at least form an acceptance of difference and tolerance.

Interestingly, some political commentators have described the Good Friday Agreement as ‘*Common Sense* for slow learners’. This anecdote may be slightly exaggerated in the telling but many commentators have expressed surprise at the contents of *Common Sense* and queried why such a document wasn’t pushed forward more during the turbulent late 1980s. As disparate as the Loyalist groupings were then it is to be regretted that the document couldn’t have been discussed more at higher levels and perhaps there is a lesson in there somewhere for us all to learn.

In conclusion, *Common Sense* had so many possibilities, so many aspirations, that

it is seen today as a remarkable piece of work written at a time of terrible community upheaval and strife, a work that almost defied the logic of the times. It stands up well today and is remarkably astute in its political predictions and analysis. Looking back now, the very aspect/desire of a group of people wanting to write it is positively revolutionary and certainly brave. It is a Futurist Manifesto sent from the past for us to look back at from our position in the here and now and marvel at what might have been had it been taken on board by the broader unionist family and the wider political establishment. It was ultimately widely ignored and forgotten about but the seeds of the ideas pulsed through the Loyalist community for years and years and is still debated and admired today. Many of the ideas and principals (now referred to as the ‘John McMichael principals’) are still embraced by many senior Loyalists today. In that sense *Common Sense* really did deliver all it set out to do.

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[Colin Halliday] So, that is the document we wanted to put forward for debate. How does the *Common Sense* document tie in with Partition and the stuff that has moved along over the past 100 years of Northern Ireland? I can remember in 1987, when the document came out, not only was it not widely accepted within the broad unionist grouping but even within my own constituency. John McMichael and others who wrote the document had difficulty selling it to their own constituents, and it is something that maybe needs to be looked at again in debate, which we are trying to do through the Ulster Political Research Group [UPRG]. So I am happy enough if we can have a debate here. And, as Kenny here would know, we have been going through different debates for years, and sometimes we go three steps forward and then get pulled four steps back! But it is something we have tried to work to achieve. I do believe, as it says here, that the Good Friday Agreement was ‘*Common Sense* for slow learners’.

[Kenny Blair] Can I thank Colin for his presentation. First of all, can I apologise for the others who had hoped to attend this event today. However – and I think it is pertinent to the discussion we are having – a number of cars were burnt out in the town last night, and that’s to do with internal feuds, drugs and stuff like that there, so those of the team who were going to come along here were out trying to sort that all out. Otherwise we would have had another half dozen with us today.

But, you hit the nail on the head when you said that we are *all* responsible for the way things went. We had Partition; we had a government of elitist Unionists for 50-odd years. I know Republicans refer to it as ‘50 years of misrule’. I would agree with that slightly, the difference would be that the narrative that is accepted is that this elitist group discriminated against the Catholics. The fact is that they discriminated against everybody who wasn’t within their own social sphere. I can remember the story of my uncle going to meet Chichester-Clark, before he became Prime Minister [of Northern Ireland], to complain about housing: Protestant working-class houses, people were living in pig-sties basically. And his reaction was... and this was a senior member of the Unionist Party at that time... basically: ‘What do you mean? All a working man needs is a roof over his head.’ And that was the attitude towards the people who were going out and voting for him! So I think the circumstances which came about in the late sixties... that all fed into it.

Common Sense devolved from talks that had been ongoing from the late seventies, through *Beyond the Religious Divide*† and talk about a Bill of Rights, and things like that. But then in 1985 we had the Anglo-Irish Agreement, with mass protests on the streets... you can see the parallel with the more recent ‘flag protests’. The end result of that was hundreds and hundreds of people ending up with criminal records and stuff like that. There were those who were taking a step further and joining paramilitary organisations. So when *Common Sense* was released at that time I thought it was a breath of fresh air, and bearing in mind a few years before that I had been a member of the DUP. But I can remember Paisley just outrightly condemning it and its authors as being ‘traitors’, and having ‘sold out Ulster’ or trying to sell it out. But the UDA

† In March 1979 the New Ulster Political Research Group (NUPRG), the study group set up by the UDA [and relaunched in 2001 as the UPRG], published *Beyond the Religious Divide*. In it they said: ‘Without the evolution of proper politics the people of Northern Ireland will continually be manipulated by sectarian politicians who make no contribution to the social and economic well-being of the people of the country, but only continue to fan the flames of religious bigotry for self-gain and preservation.’ They suggested that the only way ‘proper politics’ could emerge would be to have both Britain and Southern Ireland ‘withdraw all their claims of sovereignty over Northern Ireland’, and for the two communities to work together for Negotiated Independence, which would encourage the development of their common identity. To the people of Northern Ireland they commended the words of Bacon: ‘He who cannot compromise is a fool; he who will not compromise is a bigot; he who dare not compromise is a slave.’

[Ulster Defence Association], who were very involved in the upsurge of violence at that time, were nevertheless the first people, or the first grouping, in my opinion, within Loyalism that seriously looked at an honorable way out of conflict. And the *Common Sense* document was that put on paper. But as you say, Colin, it was just completely disregarded, and then we had another ten years of murder and mayhem before we got to the Good Friday Agreement. Now, the problem I had with the Good Friday Agreement at that time was that it was a sticking plaster, I believe, it wasn't a settlement. Both sides were told they had won. I am sure you remember those meetings, Colin: North Antrim taking a lot of flak because we were saying that this is not right, this is not going to work, because you can't tell both sides that they won, and not expect it to unravel somewhere down the line. And certainly, from a Loyalist perspective, I believe that what Unionists were told was that the Union is safe so you haven't to worry about anything. Republicans were told: look, you can get your United Ireland as long as you don't bomb people into it. So when you had one of the active partners in the government whose ultimate political goal was the destruction of the state then the wheel was bound to come off the wagon somewhere down the line.

And I think the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement certainly does not exist anywhere now, that spirit of compromise and reconciliation; I don't think it exists within the parties at Stormont, or even within the population at the minute. I think there has been a hardening and a bitterness that maybe even exceeds the height of the Troubles. Having said that, it is still possible to do great work, and a prime example occurred last week: we took a Loyalist 'blood and thunder' band to London to take part in a parade which was to honour a southern-born Irish Roman Catholic mayor of London. Now maybe a third of the band members are coming from mixed marriages. But that's an example of what *can* be done: a loyalist band who certainly identify as Loyalist, but yet are able to honour a southern-born Irish Catholic mayor. And indeed, a number of Roman Catholics travelled over with them for the event.

[**Albert Hewitt**] Kenny, we are talking about Protestant/Unionist people and where they are coming from and where they are at this Centenary. In 2012, two weeks *prior* to the decision being made to limit the displaying of the Union flag at Belfast City Hall I was inundated, from a Unite [the Union] perspective, regarding the welfare reform that was coming in. I was inundated with people's concerns: what do we do?

how do we challenge this? And all of a sudden they took the flag down† – which I didn't even know was up! – and within a day I never got one phone call about welfare; it was all about 'our flag' being taken down, and how do we get it back up? No word about their living standards! That was all forgotten!

[Kenny Blair] This is the way things have been manipulated for years. One of the reasons we find ourselves in the situation we are in is because they needed the Loyalist organisations' backing to get them over the line with regard to the Good Friday Agreement, but as soon as they got that they said: well, screw these guys, we don't need them any more. And I think it was Hugu Orde [Chief Constable, PSNI] who was on record as saying: well, because Sinn Féin had a big representation Republicanism would be politicised whereas Loyalism will be criminalised. And well, you look at that now, it is nearly an embarrassment to say that you are a Loyalist because people just automatically think: are you a drug dealer, or an extortionist or are you...

[Albert Hewitt] Was it not Tony Blair's sidekick, Jonathan Powell, who said that they have left Loyalism behind?

[Kenny Blair] I would add further to that there. As you know, drugs were a sideshow during the whole conflict, and yet within a year of the conflict ending Loyalist areas were swamped with drugs, and certain 'leaders' emerged who had a relatively small part to play during the conflict but all of a sudden became 'the voices of Loyalism'. So, to me, if you want to demonise a certain section of the community what better way to do that than to get their own communities to turn against them, and I think the weapon of drugs was used. And unfortunately we are now living with that legacy, it has got out of control, and everyone now is being tarred with the same brush.

But *despite* all this negative image, we are trying to work productively, including revisiting documents like *Beyond the Religious Divide* and *Common Sense*. There is also a women's project started now, 'Her Story' – and that's with a bit of funding from the Joseph Rowntree Trust – to study the role that women played in Loyalism.

There are certainly problems around the Belfast Agreement and stuff. I see

† On 3 December 2012 Belfast City Council voted on a Sinn Féin and SDLP proposal that the Union flag, which had been flown every day on the City Hall, should not be flown at all. The Alliance Party's compromise was carried: that the flag should be flown on 18 designated days. The decision led to widespread street protests, some of which involved inter-communal violence.

thousands of Loyalists on social media saying: ‘Pull Stormont down, it needs to go, it is corrupt!’ I would agree with a lot of these sentiments: the place is dysfunctional and is not working properly. But my response to these Loyalists is: ‘So, you want to pull Stormont down – tell me why?’ ‘Oh, the Protocol, or Brexit or whatever...’ ‘So, you want to pull that down then, and leave your representation in the hands of only fifteen members in a House of six hundred and something? They are your only representation then.’ So what I am saying is: ‘Whilst Stormont is not perfect at least it’s something. If you bring Stormont down what do you do next then?’

But then, cyber-warriors are the scourge of this generation! It is the easiest thing in the world to complain via social media. We have a situation at the moment with policing in our area, and we fought tooth and nail with the local police, and through the local PCSP, to get public meetings arranged with the police. And we have succeeded: two public meetings are being organised, one in Ballymoney and one in Limavady, where the primary task force are going to come and give an account of their policing, and the local policing teams. And we put it out on social media: ‘Right, everyone who has been on this site complaining, here is your opportunity to come and question these people.’ But we have still people coming up and saying: ‘The police are only bastards!’... but these same people will not turn up for these meetings! And we are saying to them: ‘Get your arse there into the place and put it to them!’

Anyway, I know I am moving away here from our main topic of discussion, but I agree, *Common Sense* was a lost opportunity. There was another lost opportunity after that, when we had the talks to agree a voluntary power sharing. John Hume, Gerry Fitt, and all those guys, and there was an opportunity there for a voluntary coalition. And I remember Glennie [Barr] telling me, he says we thought we’d cracked it. But when he was driving back to Londonderry Paisley was already on the media condemning them for having sold out. Now, he had agreed to it at the time but then when he went back and consulted with his troops he backed off. Now, I am being really cynical now, but I think the reason then would have been because, in terms of de Hondt†, you would have had Harry West as the major party with the Ulster Unionists, you would have had Bill Craig coming next with Vanguard, and you would have had Ian at the bottom of the dung-pile. Now, fast-forward twenty years when

† A proportional representation system which aims to allocate seats to parties approximately in proportion to the number of votes received.

Ian became the biggest party, and not only did he and Marty [Martin McGuinness] jump into bed together, they turned into the ‘chuckle brothers’! So, I just sort of think that a lot of that was down to one man’s ego, and it was only when he could be the boss that he was willing to do whatever suited him, and there were still enough silly people prepared to follow whatever somersaults he made.

But there are certainly problems we have at the minute. We have *Beyond the Religious Divide* and *Common Sense* – these are things that need to be revisited. Loyalism needs to take stock of itself and say: right, we’re not happy with this, we’re not happy with that, but there’s nobody coming up with a coherent alternative.... And while there are street protests about this and that, that’s all well and good if you want to do that, but I think it is pretty pointless. We had 300,000 in front of the City Hall in ’85, and it didn’t change things. You need a coherent strategy that you can sell to people and can actually negotiate around.

[**Albert Hewitt**] Talking about today’s realities: where do the Loyalist working class go from here? Because you have the DUP, the Ulster Unionists, the TUV – these are all conservative parties – we still don’t have a *working-class* voice.

[**Colin Halliday**] Very much so. Kenny referred to the ‘big house Unionism’ we had for fifty years. I remember having a debate in the hospital wing of Long Kesh, it must have been ’93 or ’94 – when a doctor was coming in they would have taken you over there at lunch-time. And there was an INLA man there and we were having a debate, and he was giving me ‘youse done this’, ‘youse done that’, and I explained to him that in 1982 my grandmother was still living in a house with an outside toilet, and when you had to go out to use it, it was freezing! And he said ‘No, no, no... youse didn’t live like that’. But that was the perception: that Protestants all lived in great big houses.

[**Kenny Blair**] I am sure you all know *The Old Bill* in Ypres [Belgium], the wee bar. I remember a fellow from Corrigan was there and he had this Yank with him, and he was giving him all this stuff about Protestants having everything and ‘we’ had nothing. I bit my tongue as long as I could then I walked over and told them that I lived in a cottage in the country until 1979, which not only didn’t have an inside toilet, we didn’t even have a flush toilet. You had to do your business in a bucket, and dig a hole and bury it in the garden. And I said: ‘You’re trying to tell me that I am one of the Protestant Ascendancy, and that we have everything, and stuff like that there?’ There is a lot of

things which were wrong with the old Unionist government, but let's be honest, it was like that everywhere: it was like that in mainland Britain, it was like that in the Republic of Ireland as well, with their gentry and all... so Northern Ireland wasn't unique.

[**Albert Hewitt**] It was how they sold it, that sort of story.

[**Peter Bunting**] I think probably the Civil Rights Association should have had more Protestant working-class people in it, and the fact that it started off in the university put a lot of people off as well. I mean, my father was the councillor and alderman for Smithfield Ward which took in the bottom of the Shankill and the bottom of Divis, so he represented the Loaney and the Shankill. And the houses were exactly the same: they had an outside loo, practically every house had a mangle [for squeezing the water out of washed clothes], he was able to recount all that. He was part of the Independent Labour Party. But having said that, it was a failure of the Civil Rights Association, and the trade union movement, to actually spell out what *all* the working-class people were experiencing at that particular time. Now, there *was* discrimination, it was a real problem. One of the statistics which always stuck in my head was that out of the 77 school bus drivers in County Fermanagh there was only one Catholic.

Anyway, to come back to the *Common Sense* document. I have to say I read that in 1988 and I was fascinated by it. You are right in the phraseology you used about it being 'futuristic'. I was astounded by it, I thought it was one of the best pieces of modern-day literature written, and the stable it came from was even more surprising. There was a lot of thought put into it, and I believed it was way ahead of the game altogether.

It is a pity, and you're quite right Colin, as to why the Unionist 'big house' people, and other people, sat on it, because I suppose you can't on the one hand be denigrating Loyalists – except when you needed them, of course, to be your foot soldiers – and then at the same time say: well, that's a very well-written document by them. I think there was this counter-intuitiveness about the 'big house' Unionist Party middle class, that they didn't want to acknowledge the thought that went into that document. It was certainly one of the best documents I had read at that time.

Because the Provisional IRA were doing nothing, they had gone totally against politics; I don't think they had a political thought about where they were going, in relation to ending the war, or even where they were going, except, I suppose, for what some might term, in one sense, a 'Fenian all-Ireland'! So there was that sort of thing.

Loyalism was greatly denigrated all the time by republicans.

And what's worse again was that, not long after *Common Sense* was published, the IRA assassinated John McMichael.* I mean, even that bears disbelief: if you had such a thinker within the organisation, and a leader, surely you wouldn't kill him?†

[**Kenny Blair**] I look at Ray Smallwoods as well. He was murdered a month before the IRA Ceasefire. Now Ray‡ would have been the natural heir to John McMichael and I know Ray was involved in the early peace talks at Clonard Monastery. And for the IRA to assassinate him a few weeks before they called a ceasefire! The person who was going to be the Number One negotiator for the UDA, and they took him out of the picture... I felt that if we had had Ray there in the negotiating team we would have had a far far stronger voice.

[**Michael Hall**] But don't you think that's partly why he was taken out? Ray was enthusiastic about the work I had been engaged in promoting the *shared* heritage of our two communities, and had asked to come to my house to talk about it, to see how it might help with trying to move things forward. Now, he was fully aware of the strong condemnation I repeatedly voiced about *all* the violence going on, whether emanating from Republicans or Loyalists – but *everything* he said during our discussion that day

* Notwithstanding John McMichael's military role in the ongoing conflict, Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, described him as having been "untiring, fresh and constructive and ready to cross the religious divide to find a solution for Northern Ireland." (Wikipedia)

† UDA leader Andy Tyrie, in an interview with journalist Peter Taylor, said: "John was killed because he was the best person we had and the Republican Movement didn't like him. I didn't have anybody as astute in politics as he was. They also didn't like him because he was being listened to and they knew the loss we would incur with John being killed."

‡ Peace advocate Rev Roy Magee stated that, despite Smallwood's endorsement of a policy of targeting Republicans, he proved to be an important voice for moderation in the UDA's Inner Council and a prime architect of the eventual loyalist ceasefire. Indeed, following prompting from Magee, Smallwoods opened communication with two priests from Clonard Monastery on the Falls Road, Alec Reid and Gerry Reynolds. Smallwoods, the first high-ranking Loyalist to hold regular dialogue with Catholic clergy, intimated to them that the UDA was hoping to see peace. Both priests were amongst the mourners at his funeral. Loyalists decided not to retaliate for his murder, and instead released a statement that had been drafted by Smallwoods shortly before his death in which the CLMC [Combined Loyalist Military Command] said it would go on ceasefire if the IRA did so. (Wikipedia)

was progressive and positive and peace-oriented. And I remember saying to myself: hopefully, this is Loyalism at last moving constructively forward again. Yet two weeks after sitting in my house he was murdered! The opinion of many Loyalists at the time was that the IRA did not want outsiders to see that progressive loyalism existed; the Provisionals needed to portray Loyalists as backwoods neanderthals, so that they could say to their international audience: look, you can see why we had no option but to engage in armed struggle against these bigots. Articulate and accommodating Loyalists just didn't fit in with that narrative. There was also a suspicion that the IRA leadership would have been uncomfortable having to sit at the negotiating table with people who might have had just as much political nous as they did. Indeed, as Peter intimated, the Provisionals were so fixated with the military struggle they hadn't put much political analysis into what might come when the fighting eventually had to stop.

I also want to say here that Loyalists are often their own worst enemy. In the early years of the Troubles I used to send children from disadvantaged areas on a cross-community holiday scheme to Holland [through Pax Christi Kinderhulp], and on one occasion, as I was driving some of the Dutch volunteers along the lower Shankill, one of them asked me: 'Why do these Catholics paint their kerbstones red, white and blue?' And when I told them that this was a Protestant area one of them responded: 'But how can they be Protestants? This looks like a poor area.' So, right at the beginning of the Troubles, the outside world imagined this place to be like an Algerian situation, with the French colonists – in our case the Protestants – being all middle class, while the Catholic community represented the oppressed natives. So I deliberately took this same party of Dutch around different interface areas, to let them see the identical working-class conditions – the social deprivation and poor housing. And when we were in Tigers Bay, taking photographs, a couple of Loyalists stormed over and aggressively accosted us: 'Away and fuck off, you bastards!' The Dutch were quite shaken up, and were in a hurry to get back into my car! So, Loyalists are often their own worst enemy. They had, and in many ways still have, no real clue about how to present their side of the story constructively to outsiders, certainly not in the slick way the Republican movement has been able to portray *its* side of the story.

[Peter Bunting] I just want to come back to the weaponising of loyalist areas by drugs. I think that *all* working-class areas are now weaponised by drugs, and I think that that's

a deliberate policy by the securocrats. I can also tell you, with regard to policing in Derry, for example, you have one police force in Derry which is the PSNI, who are grand, and you have another police force in Derry, the TSG [Tactical Support Group], which is under the command of MI5. And they are ruining the place. In fact they are creating, and growing, the New IRA and other dissidents, because of oppression. In all the years that we went through all this carry-on, surely everyone should know by now that the more you oppress people the more they will revolt. Whether it is Republicans or Loyalists or anybody. And they're still at it up in Derry. And I could give you chapter and verse of what's going on up there, it is unbelievable.

[Jacqui Blair] It is coming straight up to Ballymoney as well. You have the TSG in taxis stopping young fellows.

[Kenny Blair] Yes, there was an incident in Coleraine. A guy driving along the road and a taxi pulls up beside him, hooded men, gun pointed at him, he is trailed out... This is the police – and they are in jeans and balaclavas! Now, the guy thought he was getting blacked. And this is all stuff which we have been trying to address with the police. In our opinion the Superintendent of the area is using ‘stop and search’ powers illegally. He admitted – during a meeting at our office – that he is using this power as a deterrent. I said: ‘Well, that’s great: in 2019 we had two shootings in the Causeway Coast and Glens area, and to date we’ve had twenty-one! So that deterrent is really working!’ They are very reluctant to have a public meeting, but we have fought to get public meetings. But, as I said earlier, my worry is that now that the opportunity is there for people to go and speak to the police, they just won’t bother. And yet the next night when the police come along in their helicopters flying twenty feet above their houses they will be on the internet yet again, complaining about ‘these black so-and-sos...!’

[Colin Halliday] And people will criticise you, Kenny, for the good hard work that you do. *We* get criticised for all our good, hard work. And we ask these people: tell us what the alternative is? And their alternative is: just sit at home and blank the bastards out. That doesn’t work. We tried that. You have to engage with them. We have a saying: the police need to do their job better to make ours easier. And unfortunately there’s also people within the system who still see us as the baddies who shouldn’t be engaged with.

[Jacqui Blair] At the beginning of this year we sent thirty ‘freedom of information’ requests – and not one reply.

[Albert Hewitt] The police want the UDA, the UVF, the IRA – all of them – to go away. But see when there is trouble of a cross-community nature on the road, the first people the police phone is people like Colin or Kenny, the representatives.

[Peter Bunting] That’s the ordinary police, the decent police. That’s what I would call the changed PSNI. But behind that there is another grade of policing. And I know there is a group of them... and I don’t know whether it’s for training or whatever, but there must be 300 of them out there at Hollywood, MI5 or whatever. And this is not a joke... I am the treasurer of the Fellowship of Messines and they wouldn’t let me see the accounts, MI5 wouldn’t let me in.

[Harry Donaghy] We ended up speaking to the bank’s Head of Human Resources in London, and she was able to say that someone internally in the Ulster Bank here had classed Peter as ‘PEP’ – ‘personally exposed politically’! And that was the reason why we couldn’t access our accounts. And we said, look, we’re in trouble here, we are bound by law to produce audited accounts each year, and to renew our insurance, etc. Now, we have the money there to pay bills but we can’t either write cheques or transfer electronically. But it came down to this ‘PEP’ notice. Now, not one apology, no explanation as to why this was done. I thought we were going to be leaving this kind of stuff behind us.

Anyway, to get back to *Common Sense* and the need for talking our way out of conflict. On the republican side, the Adams leadership knew they weren’t going to get their original demand, which was a statement of intent from Britain to withdraw. They knew that some form of talks process would have to be entered into, beginning perhaps with the talks that were held up in Clonard Monastery and other places under the auspices, or the protection of, brokers like Alec Reid, Harold Good and others. And think also of some of these conversations which took place in Long Kesh.

As for the Loyalist side, I remember Gusty Spence’s address to the UVF/Red Hand Commando, in Compound 21, on 12th July 1977. Now, that’s another very interesting document. Serious political debate was going on in Loyalism about how do we move things on. I remember that position papers would have been exchanged

on a fairly regular basis. The one thing that kicked off discussions which lasted the longest was simply one sentence: 'Is this as good as it gets?' So that question was circulated, and the PUP was certainly up for it in Long Kesh. The UDA were also trying to map a way forward.

But all the time you were struggling not only against the overbearing weight of the negativity of history, but those people, who, for whatever their agenda, really didn't want to get into a political discussion about the pros and cons of this or that, and all they needed to do, to stop anything dead in the water, was to point across the room and shout 'Traitor!' I remember the saying that the Provos were too smart to admit that they had lost, and the Unionists were too stupid to realise that they had basically won: they had taken violent nationalism to the point where it was actually going to vote itself out of existence, and that did happen.

But the place where we're at at the minute is also fraught with danger, and it should be alarm bells ringing everywhere, especially when you look at the current disturbances in East Belfast or Lanark Way, just round the corner from where I live. These children who are getting involved in all this mayhem weren't born when the Good Friday Agreement was signed. What are we going to do about that?

And all this stuff about the Protocol; I mean, the very Unionist politicians who are so vociferously against it, were the very ones who helped to deliver it! The DUP destroyed a British prime minister and her political agenda, and people like Jeffery Donaldson was leading the banzai charge in Westminster, and associating Ulster Unionism with right-wing headcases like Rees-Mogg, people who live in an imagined, invented world of English exceptionalism. A process that has been under way in British politics for half a century is coming to fruition. And it won't be the IRA who will break up the Union: the disintegration of the United Kingdom is being instigated and manipulated by Home Counties English Conservatives, who now see an opportunity where the all-too-troublesome, and expensive, Celtic fringe can be quietly dispensed with. That includes Scotland, and certainly this place as well.

But to return to the topic of the need for dialogue... people who put the Fellowship of Messines together in the first place had gotten to know one another, friendships had developed, and understandings, and very importantly trust, and we chose North Antrim here for a series of engagements and discussions on centenary events under the theme: 'Can we let the Past imprison our Future?' – referring back to that communique

that went round the compounds in Long Kesh a good number of years before. Because we could see that all of the things that were coming up: the hundredth anniversary of the Signing of the Covenant, the Dublin Lock-Out 1913, the Great War... all of those things. So we asked ourselves: how do we prepare ourselves? We dealt reasonably well with discussions around World War One and the Covenant and so forth. But what are we going to do, how are we going to prepare ourselves – and encourage others who are prepared to talk with us, or are interested in the same things – when we get to that stage on the historical clock when it is no longer our grandparents' history, it is *ours*. So the Messines discussions helped immensely, despite all of the pressures, all of the seeming road-blocks that we have encountered along the way.

And I think it is still arguable that such debate is needed today more than ever. We need to be talking, and we need to be having younger ones there as members of the audience. When we put together the programme on 'Reflections on 1969: Lived Experiences and Living History', people asked: why are we doing this? And we said: look, there's far too many people that we know are exiting the stage and those histories go with them; we have to find a way of bringing all that together and having what Mike does so very well – getting it recorded and widely disseminated. Now, you can argue: I don't agree with that, or I think this or that. But the people we had in the room, along with the politics and history students from Queens, were listening to people talking about how did 1969 come about, from Republicans who had joined the movement after the call to dump arms in 1962. Frank here would have been part of the republican movement, before, during and after Operation Harvest, and so we had people present in that room talking about real personal experiences. And we had Loyalist colleagues who had been about the place when the modern UVF was reactivated, and the UDA was brought into being. And we were *all* able to engage, quite openly and honestly, with one another. And it wasn't a Basil Fawly approach: 'Whatever you do, don't mention the war!' And people were hearing things that they had never heard before. But it was *factual* history, *lived* history. Just because lived history is not always talked about, because it doesn't have tomes and books recording it, doesn't mean it didn't happen.

So, again, we do have unique opportunities to still look at the generation who post-1969 found themselves reluctant guests of Her Majesty in Crumlin Road Gaol or Long Kesh or on the *Maidstone*, and let's have that reasoned discussion and debate,

because this whole society at present seem to be losing the plot. It's a worrying time in that regard, that people have basically surrendered to tribal witchdoctors, instead of utilising the wealth of experience and knowledge that we have around us in the various constituencies where we exist day to day. Surely that shouldn't be squandered or wasted. People say there's been too much talking...unfortunately there hasn't been *enough*, and events have proven that there hasn't been enough. And those who *are* doing a lot of the talking are taking people along some crazy pathways here. I think we should all be somewhat concerned about that.

[Kenny Blair] This is probably the last opportunity for people who remember from the mid-sixties to the end of the Troubles, this is probably their last opportunity to speak about that. As you say, the young kids who are out rioting weren't even born before the Ceasefires or the Good Friday Agreement. It is easy to look at the murals and think of the 'glorious struggle' – whether it was green or orange – and romanticise it that way, but in reality it was a totally different thing. In our programme we would have a lot of ex-prisoners and others speak to young people and say: that is well and good, but you were getting your door bated in at six o'clock in the morning...

[Peter Bunting] There was nothing romantic about it!

[Harry Donaghy] We have to learn to take the word 'surrender' out of the vocabulary when we are talking about things like this. If you are seen to be talking to 'them', that's a step too far; if you're coming up with alternative ideas or suggestions about how we could maybe work together to have an economic, social, political entity that has some form of stability and broad support, to some people that's not on. And this retreat all the time to the past: it was better back then, we all knew where we stood. Nonsense: it proved to be a total disaster, and if it is tried again it will be as equally disastrous. So I think people like ourselves are obligated to say to people: no, tell me what is intrinsically bad about people like ourselves meeting and talking and exchanging ideas and possibilities? We have settled unfortunately for the management of apartheid, the twenty-odd years from that Agreement was signed, and the 'bad boys' were coming in from the dark and playing a positive role... that's all been squandered.

[Kenny Blair] It has enshrined sectarianism, so it has. Apartheid – this forced thing where you have your token Prod or your token Taig, and you have your tokenism: oh,

I will go for a visit to a GAA match, things like that there. It is all bullshit: people just tick boxes and say: let's get the funding then. I remember taking a whole lot of flack in the 90s, regarding the parades problems. Up in Derry where you had the Bogside Residents demanding that people engage directly with them... and Davy Nichol and myself putting it forward to our people: look, what harm is there in calling their bluff? And that was the way we had to sell it to our constituency: let's call their bluff. So we did that, and eventually, look what you have now. You have the 'Maiden City Accord', you have 10,000 strong, 150-odd bands parading through the centre of a 98% nationalist city centre on 12th August; you have the burning of Lundy coming up in a couple of weeks time... and not a TSG in sight. You have the Apprentice Boys on their club days in September forming up in the Waterside and parading through to the Memorial Hall. Even one of them had a parade to the Guildhall, and that was the first time they had been there from the infamous '69. All that is happening without any hinderance. We have had Messines parades up there, where the Union Jack and the Irish Tricolour are carried side by side. I know one Sunday a few dissidents were hanging around the Diamond, and they were bawling and shouting, and then the next thing they saw the Union Jack and the Tricolour side by side and that silenced them! That shows that if people used their brains...

[**Albert Hewitt**] And remember there was a parade going through Rasharkin every year and that was sorted too, and there hasn't been a problem since. It's going back to what Harry said: it's all about people talking.

[**Kenny Blair**] It was myself and Jim Wright who went to speak to them; you had Declan McGlinchy, son of Dominic, and Declan Casey, and Dominic would have been responsible for the demise of a few people I would have known ...but then our people would have been responsible for the demise of his uncle and things like that there. But inside two hours we had the whole thing sorted. And it went from 300 protesters being bused in to a total of 30 protesters until there is nothing now at all. The only thing is that the Parades Commission keep coming up with some stupid ruling every year! Actually two years ago when the Commission came up with some ruling Declan actually told us: 'This has nothing to do with us, we are happy with the way things are swinging.' And even the police were pissed off, because they had already put their operation in place, and they had to start two days before it and

change it. And on the 12th July three years ago Declan actually contacted me and said, 'Look, we're taking all the young lads who would normally be a problem out of the village; you've got Rasharkin for the day, try and leave it the way you got it.' And that's how it can be done. And we had a great relationship with Teach Na Failte. But certain people try to undermine your work. I can think of a so-called intelligence document that was alleged to have fallen into the hands of the UDA; the police visited over 30 people in Rasharkin and said: look, we believe that the UDA have your contact details, your address, etc, and they may be targeting you. So there was an intermediary came and spoke to us, we went and sat in a hotel with the Teach Na Failte guys, and I was able to go and seek assurances: look, is there any active targeting? ... absolutely not. The whole thing just stank, and considering the address where this document was supposedly 'found', it was an old pensioner living in Ballymoney. But it done the trick for the police, for they were able to get the task-force into the area, and extra resources, for I suppose they saw North Antrim as being the 'rednecks', and then you have these dissident crew who are in Rasharkin.

But that 12th July was the first time in twenty years there wasn't one incident; before that there had been stand-offs, bomb scares. And local people were happy. I know certainly the pub at the corner was happy, for they got a few quid of mine that day. The supermarket ran out of food, they had to close at two o'clock in the afternoon! That was it. The guy in the pub said: this is great; for years we had to close the pub; I certainly have no problem with it.

[Colin Halliday] I relate to that there... we have ten miles of interfaces in South Belfast, the Falls and the South Lisburn, and when we talked to the powers-that-be about getting support, all you get from them is: sure there's nothing happening. But look at how much effort you put in, and other people, constituency reps put in, to *make* nothing happen. And that don't get that one bit. It's a continuous job to make sure that nothing happens.

[Kenny Blair] Colin, I have been so frustrated. I have actually said: see for a fucking year, we should just step back from everything, and then let it all go tits-up, and go: come on! They are knocking on your door, and then two weeks later you're only a whatever. As Glennie [Barr] used to say, you're a great fellow when they need you, but they wouldn't want you to marry their daughter!

[Harry Donaghy] Again, it goes back to the reason we all ended up in an old primary school in the village of Messines in Flanders. Contacts were made through the ex-prisoner groups, and it was explained what the motivation was; nobody was frog-marched into it or told a lie... everyone was clear about what was being done and why they were invited. A very small group of people originally, but some of us had known one another for quite a while before that, and saw... we weren't opportunistic but we saw opportunities, to broaden the discussion out to where it needed to be, about the whole concept of nationalism, identity, in all its forms, with a particular emphasis on our own unique circumstances. Our grandfathers' and our grandmothers' sacrifices in the generation back then wasn't totally worthless. Why did my grandfather enlist with the Connaught Rangers in August 1914, on the Falls Road? It was very very useful then to expand discussions and debates on to the later years. We don't get carried away with ourselves, we keep our feet carefully on the ground; we know the circumstances, the difficulties, and we don't seek publicity in any way. But everybody is still there who was involved. Now, we have lost some people... Ken Wilkinson passed away there, but the willingness of people to say that stuff like this is worthwhile... It won't be on the *Sunday Times* best-seller list or anything like that, but they *are* opportunities...

[Kenny Blair] The pamphlets that have resulted from some of the recent Messines debates and workshops are a great reference for younger people. None of them is interested in an academic study, because you will lose them.

[Harry Donaghy] When we tried it out in the 'Reflections on 1969' series of talks, a friend of ours, who is a professor at Queen's University, said: I will host one of your events up here in Queen's; the pay-back is you let me send along some of my history and politics students to it. And they came along and they fell in love with it, for they instinctively understood that this isn't some dry academic exploration of past history and events, we're in the room with people who were there, who were front and centre.... living history...

And again what we are planning... we are getting to a very interesting year in the historical calendar, 1922. We are putting a series of talks together and we will not be providing opportunities for people to stand up and read scripture to one another, we intend to have a critical examination of the events of that period. And if anything at all it can help us come to terms with our delinquent forms of nationalism. This is the

only part of these islands where the nationalisms that were predominate 100 years ago are still in the ascendancy. We have not just academic friends, we have people from groups and organisations who can bring – like Colin did this morning – a critique to the table for open discussion and debate, and nobody is surrendering anything. We have to play as positive a role in saying to people: you can do this, and should be doing it, more often, and with more people. And it *doesn't* mean surrender. We are playing catch-up with the other 70 million-odd people across these islands, about where exactly they are at, at this juncture in history. And if we can contribute anything positive to those debates then that would be a good thing.

[Kenny Blair] Because of the positive work that we done in our area – the Causeway Coast – last Easter, when the rest of the place was going mad, we were the one area that wasn't – and this was acknowledged by the funding bodies. Now, the police might have been critical of us sometimes, because we might be a bit critical of them, but I did get a phone call from Ann Mulloy to say, 'I have to hand it to youse, you are the only area that's not going mad.'

[Michael Hall] In terms of *Common Sense* and what we are trying to do at the moment all you can maybe hope to do is move the parameters of debate. I remember one time, very early on, at one of the Shankill Think Tank discussions – involving Gusty Spence, Billy Hutchinson, Roy Garland, Jackie Redpath, and others – when I put the draft together and handed it around, the first thought they voiced was: are we going too far beyond the mood of people in the Shankill, is it too radical, is it what people are ready for? But we went ahead with it anyway, and distributed it around the area. And a few months later, as I was walking down the Shankill I was stopped by May Blood, and she said: 'Michael, something interesting to tell you. I was at a women's meeting the other day, and they were talking about topics which I had thought up to now had been taboo on the Shankill. And I said "I'm glad to see you talking about these things." And one of them replied: "Well, if the Shankill Think Tank can talk about these things, then so can we."' So you can move the parameters of debate, even if what you say initially has problems being accepted. But it hopefully percolates into the broader debate.

[Kenny Blair] Because we would represent such a large geographical area, we have different debates going on in different places. Like Ballymena, Ballymoney, Bushmills, which are staunchly Unionist areas. Then you have got other fellas who are

living in Castlederg who have a lot of family members who were killed during the Troubles, who are probably a lot more insular and uncomfortable about sitting down face-to-face with Republicans and such like. But you just don't give up on them. If an area is ready for doing things, then we work with them, but at the same time we continue to work with the other ones. The old Paisley doctrine was: "we'll not sit in the same room as these people" and stuff like that... we try to overcome that.

[**Albert Hewitt**] Well, he done it himself!

[**Kenny Blair**] He done it regularly. But what I'm saying is that they gave Sinn Féin twenty years of *not having* to debate, because while Ian wouldn't sit in the room with them their case went uncontested.

[**Harry Donaghy**] It's an opportunity to critically engage with nationalism. What do we mean going into the third decade of the 21st century, what is this republic some talk about? Next year will maybe be a test of certainly the maturity of the Irish state, because more than the war of Independence, more than the 1916 Rising, the event that stamped its mark on the body politic of Southern Ireland was the Civil War. Now the 'Soldiers of Destiny' and the 'Soldiers of Ireland' – Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil – how are they go to deal with that particular thing? But that debate hasn't taken place.

[**Michael Hall**] There has never been a *real* in-depth debate. I mentioned earlier the Dutch group I worked with, sending local children to Holland on a summer scheme. I remember many years ago taking some of the Dutch volunteers around different areas, and we happened to be in Beechmount, where one of them said: 'What's that building over there?' And I told them it was a Sinn Féin advice centre. And they asked to go in, so I took them in. And as I went in, a voice said: 'Mike, where have you been all these years!' It was a good friend who had been in the People's Democracy with me. And I was really glad to see him; at last I had someone I could talk *real* politics with – socialism, anarcho-syndicalism, libertarian socialism... not the 'Prods and Taigs' stuff I usually had to suffer. And I said to him: "Tell me this, seeing that you have joined Sinn Féin, what is their take on the economy: do they envisage a capitalist economy, a mixed economy, is there any talk of workers' control?" And what he said shook me to the core: 'Mike, we'll worry about that when the Brits are kicked out!' And I said: 'But if you haven't a thought-out vision of a United Ireland, how are you

ever going to sell it to people?’ He said: ‘Mike, there’s a bloody war going on, and that must take priority.’ And that was it... full stop. No debate, no thinking, no analysis.

[Peter Bunting] When you think of that 1922 period. What it did, we created two sectarian states. One down there, and one up here. I just want to ask Colin one question: has the document actually been published again?

[Colin Halliday] No, we are looking at it, and there is a lot of debate within the UPRG about updating it and getting it out. We have a lot of young people coming along who want to be part of the UPRG and they have no concept of the *Common Sense* document. They know about John – well, they know the sexy bits about John but they don’t know about John sitting to three and four o’clock in the morning really raking his brains over this here. And that’s why we want to get it out, to the young ones. I would be quite honest, until Harry came to me about it I hadn’t read it right through in 28, 29 years. And I remember when it was first set down to us, we had no interest in it. We were seen as military men and all of a sudden John was telling us: read this here. If my recollection is right, we just glanced at it; John had big problems selling it to his constituents.

[Kenny Blair] The most enthusiastic person about it up our way was probably one of the most militant people. And while I was just taking a cursory glance at it, he was saying: this is it, this is what we are fighting for. I suppose I did then take time to read it, and we have now put it into our peace impact programme this year, that we would revisit it.

[Peter Bunting] Where I came across it was in Trinity College, doing a degree in Politics and Business, and it had just come out so they put it on the course, because it was such an amazing document.

[Kenny Blair] Cardinal Ó Fiaich was a supporter of it.

[Peter Bunting] It struck a chord. My background is republican, as you know, and I was fascinated by it. I thought it was a really progressive document.

[Michael Hall] One positive thing about John, he genuinely broadened his outreach, he didn’t just keep it within the organisation. While he was working on the draft of *Common Sense* he gave me a copy of it and – knowing that I worked in both communities – asked me if I could add anything to it from a cross-community

perspective. So I wrote down some suggestions. But that revealed to me that John wasn't looking at it solely from a purely Loyalist paramilitary organisation perspective, he was willing to engage with other people in a much broader debate.

[Harry Donaghy] And we need that debate today and tomorrow more than ever. So when we are putting the next programme together hopefully we can maintain a good relationship with Unite [the Union] as well on this, because that's important in what sort of future we're going to be heading to. This is as important now as those *in camera* talks that took place in Long Kesh in the 1970s and 80s. We need to be doing that now, and contributing to making it happen.

[Frank McArdle] My experience of the last number of years... One of the most learned sessions – and that includes the time in the Crumlin Road and everything else – was a group which Harry arranged in Bushtown, where we had a representative of every class and creed, for a number of sessions. And something similar needs to happen again. And the benefits of that: I often see people in different places, and they are still talking about that. Whether it was UDA, UVF, INLA, Provos or whatever... all sitting able to talk. Nobody was shouting, nobody was point-scoring. An information centre – yes. A learning centre – certainly, probably the best I can think of, and I am 83-years-old. And I think that is the best example I have seen as to how we can get together. And the main thing is talking and listening, not everybody just talking and not everybody just listening, but people talking *and* listening. Something like that needs to happen again.

[Colin Halliday] That's a good thought to finish on, and I look forward to that.

[Harry Donaghy] Thank you again, Colin, and thank you everybody.

[Frank McArdle] Just one last thing of interest. I had a meeting one time with Sean Garland, Seán Mac Stíofáin and others sitting around the top table, back in the sixties. I think there was also two professors at the table. And there was an old gentleman sitting beside me and he had been listening to the debate for some time, and then said: 'Could I ask all you learned gentlemen a question?' And his emphasis was on the word 'learned'. 'Certainly, what is your question?' 'Can any of you learned gentlemen tell me how to walk across a ploughed field without getting your feet dirty?' Those on the panel looked at each other. 'Give us your question again.' So he repeated it. And no-

one could come up with an answer. So this old man, who was 80-odds, said, ‘You can’t; just like you cannot go into politics and expect to stay completely clean.’

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A follow-up Zoom discussion with Colin Halliday took place on 4 December:

[David Thompson] I would like to get into a proper debate, about how we pull the PUL [Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist] community towards the trade union movement. We walk into Shorts, we walk into Translink... and there’s people from those communities are union members, but they are not as active as what they used to be.

[Peter Bunting] Yes, it is one of the banes of my life: we need to generate more activity within the Protestant community in trade unionism. That community are getting used and abused by everyone, and the trade union movement should be helping them more.

[David Thompson] You have to remember, Peter, when Fair Employment legislation was brought in, Protestants felt: okay, there was an acceptance within the PUL community that there *was* discrimination. But the housing conditions were the same for everybody, and Protestants were saying: well, I’ve been discriminated against too, my area is no better than the area across the street, why are people now turning to what they call ‘positive discrimination’? And I think because there was no push-back from the unions at that time, it switched people off as well. So I think we have to look into ourselves as trade unionists, as much as we have to look at the outside influences that actually impacted and built up that sort of mindset. We have to address that mindset.

[Peter Bunting] We have to look forward, and identify what’s the best solution for *all* of us going forward, and that best solution is only through unification of the working-class people. We need anti-poverty strategies, because *both* our working-class communities suffer from poverty, a lack of educational achievement, and other things.

[David Thompson] I think that if we are going to make Protestants/Unionists/Loyalists feel inclusive in the trade union movement – indeed, to become *activists* within the movement – then we have to start from the grassroots. But, to complicate things, we have to listen to all the talk about ‘Trade Unionists for a United Ireland: let’s have the discussion’. It’s like Brexit: let’s get the thing in place and then we will deal

with all the repercussions that come after it. It's absolute madness! How do people within the movement actually think that Unionists/Loyalists/Protestants view all that?

[Peter Bunting] The problem with many in the movement is that they won't accept that, they won't listen to people with a bit of sense. 'Trade Unionists for a United Ireland' is the worst development I can think of! It is going to split the movement.

[David Thompson] Yes, they don't care about the movement, they don't care about who's *in* the movement, they only care about their own politics, and *their* vision of how Ireland will move forward in the future.

[Colin Halliday] I have always been a trade unionist and I have always promoted the movement. And I think what we need to do is have more people from the movement coming into the community, talking to people, giving them concrete examples of how trade union power can be used to better their everyday conditions. But PUL people are scared, especially when they hear all this 'Trade Unionists for a United Ireland' stuff. Prods go: 'I don't want any part of that!' The trade union movement has to accept that here's a mass of people who don't want a United Ireland, but *do want* to be members of a trade union. They need to show them that whether you are Protestant, Catholic or Dissenter there are good reasons to be in the trade union movement. Show them: this is what you can achieve by being a member of a trade union.

[Harry Donaghy] There was a very relevant piece of work which took place over quite a number of years, the 'Prison to Peace' project being the last major one. At the beginning of all of that, funding organisations came under extreme political pressure because they were dealing with the people deemed responsible for it all. But, as Colin and others would know, those engagements with the so-called 'bad people' that took place, the conversations, showed the capability of people to engage with very contentious issues, and do so in a manner that was respectful, but which didn't require the participants to abandon their own understanding of who and what they were. But we have lost quite a lot of that in recent years, we are losing the generosity of spirit that was about when the Good Friday Agreement was signed. And let's be blunt here, it was so-called loyalist 'bad boys' who actually made it happen. When did you ever see Paisley in his size-14 boots scampering away when he was confronted that evening in April up at Stormont when the TV camera cut to that portacabin that was being used

and you could see our good and late friend Ken Wilkinson pointing the finger of accusation at Paisley.

But today, people are *still* talking to one another, behind the scenes, away from the cameras, and they are still prepared, capable and willing to engage with the so-called contentious issues that we face today. And we need to be speaking to one another now more than ever. Some of these conversations started off in the compounds of Long Kesh in the 1970s and continued to when we finally reached the stage where the gun could be taken out of the political dialogue with one another. So the seemingly impossible *can* be done, we proved that. People keep saying: oh, this will never happen, that will never happen... but it ended up that *it did*, eventually. Now, taking cognisance of where we're at today, Colin, these new and particular circumstances, we have to prove to others – especially young people who think they missed something because they weren't about when the conflict was going on and want to do their bit – we have to prove to them that not only is it possible, but it is can be very productive, when people people discuss with one another rather than stand apart and read tribal scripture to one another. So, how can we support one another, how can we play a part in making these conversations, those engagements, happen?

[**Colin Halliday**] Harry, you're right there. You mentioned 'Prison to Peace' and I think it's a shame that that project was let go to the wall. It was very difficult for both loyalists and republicans at those first meetings; the five main groups who were involved in the conflict going into a room and sitting down and engaging with one another... yet it worked. And then all of a sudden the funding stopped... Jackie McDonald said to me: 'To get us into that room on the first day, the government would have send limousines, helicopters, but by the end of 2015, when we were still doing all that same work, if you had've been in a car and broke down they wouldn't even have given you a push!' And today, when you talk to government about current problems – Brexit, the Protocol, etc. – they say, 'But sure there is nothing happening.' And you have to explain to them how much work we have to do *to make sure* that nothing happens. Even though I am in a different job now, and don't really have the time to do other activities, I still engage with all the republican and loyalist groups; that has to continue to make sure that nothing happens. We had the 'Open Doors' project, which was doing fantastic work with migrants, and it was just let go to the

wall. And although I don't have the time now to do this work, we still have to do it. And we did take risks; I know both republicans and loyalists took big risks all during those times, and we got shafted at the end of it, while the politicians are still sitting in their gravy train. And whether we are funded or not we still have to continue that work. I actually think someone has said to government: see if you don't pay them, they will do it anyway. Because we *have* to do it. I mean, the best part of yesterday I was on phone calls with republicans over in West Belfast, to deal with problems around the ten miles of interfaces we have – from Broadway to south Lisburn. But because there is nothing major happening at those interfaces people just say: why would we fund this group or that group to keep the work going, sure they're doing it anyway. I still keep in touch with Teach na Failte, with The Plough [ex-prisoner] Group, with EPIC.

[David Thompson] We get treated like we are a post-conflict country, when in reality we are just in the next phase of a conflict, and that's the phase of transition from being in physical conflict to now political conflict. I don't think Unionism had a good voice in terms of our political representatives; I don't think they really care about Loyalism or working-class communities. Well, some of them do, but many don't. After the ceasefires Republicans were able to move into politics, but that never happened in terms of Loyalism. Instead of taking the next step from the Prison to Peace partnership – which would have been educating young people, alerting them to the realities of conflict – they have let it go, and we now have a new young generation who think it is a great thing to go out and have a riot. And I think we are very close at times to going back to a serious situation again.

[Colin Halliday] Yes, unfortunately, that could be only a stone's throw away – literally. We engage with young ones, and we can see that these sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds could be very easily influenced by the wrong people. Because you hear it from them. They think that what went on here was something they have missed out on, and that it was great fun. But as we all know, especially those that were involved in it, there was no fun about it at all. They don't realise the intensity of what that conflict involved.