

# Conflict Transformation Papers

## Volume 8

A Watching Brief?  
The Political Strategy of Progressive Loyalism Since 1994

By Aaron Edwards and Stephen Bloomer

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## **Conflict Transformation Papers**

“Building Peace Through Partnership” is a conflict transformation programme being developed by LINC Resource Centre in partnership with a number of community-based initiatives that are committed to constructive dialogue between individuals and groups as a means of facilitating conflict transformation at grass roots level.

It is our intention to publish a series of papers on issues raised at community level which project participants believe are relevant to the conflict transformation process.

Series Editor:	Billy Mitchell
Programme Staff:	Michael Atcheson Danny Lavery Louise Mc Lean Gerry O ‘Reilly John Loughran

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## **Editor's Foreword**

One of the core aims of the Building Peace through Partnership programme is to facilitate dialogue around key issues which we believe are relevant to the process of peace building. While it is important for us to focus on post-ceasefire / post-Agreement dialogue, the dialogue that took place within both the republican and the loyalist organisations in the years leading up to the ceasefires in 1994 should not be forgotten. In this, the tenth anniversary year of the ceasefire we have decided to publish papers on some aspects of the internal dialogue that took place within both republicanism and loyalism prior to and immediately after the ceasefires.

In Issue 7 of the series John Loughran examined the Sinn Fein peace strategy and in this issue Aaron Edwards and Stephen Bloomer look at the internal dialogue within loyalism that preceded the loyalist ceasefire. They also take a critical look at the political strategy of progressive loyalism since the 1994 ceasefires. This is a “warts and all” critique by two academics from a working class Protestant background that is meant to challenge rather than to applaud. It would have been easy, and perhaps more politically expedient, to have commissioned an insider to prepare a paper highlighting all the positive aspects of the progressive loyalist journey. However those of us involved in conflict transformation within progressive loyalism require reality checks and critical analysis to help keep us focused, not congratulatory slaps on the back. The analysis provided by Aaron Edwards and Stephen Bloomer present us with a necessary reality check.

Billy Mitchell  
Series Editor  
September 2004

## Authors' Foreword

This short booklet is a product of several years spent analysing Ulster Loyalism from a personal and academic perspective. It is something of a truism that those who write regularly on this topic are often socially and geographically detached from their subject matter. In our case the reverse is more accurate. While we both hail from similar working class Protestant backgrounds we nevertheless hope that our academic and professional training has enabled us to run a fairly objective diagnostic check on the current condition of Progressive Loyalism, a decade on from the paramilitary ceasefires, in order to provide helpful recommendations for its future development. To that end our work here is intended principally as a problem-solving exercise rather than as a purely academic treatise: we find little merit in pontificating about something that ultimately invites dispassionate and critically rigorous analysis.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to members of the Progressive Unionist Party for their co-operation; in particular: David Ervine, Billy Hutchinson, Dougie Jamison, Dugald McCullough, Dawn Purvis, Colin Robinson and Robin Stewart. Special thanks must go to Billy Mitchell at LINC for commissioning us to write *A Watching Brief?* Other people who made themselves available for interview include: William 'Plum' Smith (EPIC), Tom Roberts (EPIC) and Tom Winstone (Greater Shankill Alternatives). Aaron Edwards would like to pass on his kind regards to Gusty Spence for engaging in frequent good-humoured conversations about Loyalism and other aspects of Northern Irish history and politics.

We also thank the UVF leadership for permitting us valuable interview time.

*The positions and interpretations expressed herein, unless otherwise indicated, are solely those of the authors and are not necessarily a reflection of the policies, convictions or life experiences of the constituency under examination.*

We acknowledge the support of our supervisors at Queen's: Professor Adrian Guelke and Dr Graham Walker and extend our warm appreciation to Professor Richard English for his advice and guidance on the broader project of which this document is part. The pioneering work of our fellow researchers in Ulster Loyalism studies - Roy Garland and Professor Jim McAuley - is saluted. We alone are responsible for any errors.

Deserving of a mention here are the staff of the Linenhall Library's Northern Ireland Political Collection who work tirelessly to support the intellectual endeavours of those researching our Province's troubled history.

Lastly we pay tribute to our families and friends who have permitted us the necessary time and space to undertake this research and other academic studies in the past.

Aaron Edwards and Stephen Bloomer  
September 2004

*My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship,  
a sense of injustice. When I sit down to write a book,  
I do not say to myself, "I am going to produce a work  
of art." I write it because there is some lie that I want  
to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention,  
and my initial concern is to get a hearing.*

- George Orwell, *Why I Write*

## **Introduction**

Loyalism, like mainstream Unionism, has faced many crossroad decisions since the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994, and latterly from the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. As a grass-roots political creed - with subscription drawn principally from the Protestant working class - it has seen its local 'politico' representatives simultaneously converge and disperse over support for a faltering peace process whilst, conterminously, its 'militarist' elements have entered into at least four ferocious rounds of bloodletting against one another. As a result 'Progressive Loyalism'<sup>1</sup> has had its pragmatic non-combatant style of politics tarnished by the violent actions perpetrated by its paramilitary 'partners'.

It can be argued that in Northern Ireland 'pro-state' terrorism – as practiced by Loyalist paramilitaries - has failed to generate wide public support, except, of course, in those few heartlands where it still finds great succour from working class Protestants. This view can be substantiated by an examination of those few months in 2000-01, when the LVF, in conjunction with the UDA's 'C Company', provoked the UVF-RHC into a violent confrontation; the period later became known perhaps most infamously as the 'Shankill Feud'. Recently the vacuous tribulations of an anti-ceasefire rump, which shattered the peaceful tranquillity of East Belfast and North Down in early 2004, further illustrates that internecine strife remains an ever-present reality: it seems that the clatter of guns in predominantly Protestant working class housing estates is a grotesque manifestation of the internal haemorrhaging currently afflicting Ulster Loyalist politics and ideology.

It is no surprise then to find Progressive Loyalism subjected to a metaphorical beating at the polls from time to time, even in those inner-city estates and rural hamlets where it is still possible to find some semblance of the 'positive' role played by paramilitary activists in the service of their communities.

The causes and effects of this schism in 'politico' and 'militarist' attitudes, concerning the superintendence of Loyalist political strategies, remains an under-analysed factor in our understanding of the problems bedevilling Northern Irish politics and society in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The following document investigates possible reasons for this anomaly and explores what, if any, political future may exist for the Progressive Loyalist project.

There is a strong conviction among key PUP strategists that the current raucous state of Loyalism generally is due, at least in part, to the pressures and dilemmas confronting most pro-state forces around the globe; especially in those places where a diminishing threat from anti-state groupings meets with a pragmatic realisation that a return to political dialogue with ideological foes is 'a necessary evil'. Furthermore when an impending democratisation process looms large on the horizon it is common that resistance, particularly from those caught in a reactionary mindset, should register itself in physical force terms. Billy Mitchell explains the difficulties facing Loyalism as it endeavours to transform itself from a narrowly conceived militaristic phenomenon into a sophisticated social and political philosophy.

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<sup>1</sup> By the umbrella term 'Progressive Loyalism' we mean primarily those activists and supporters who identify themselves with the UVF-RHC-PUP constituency.

Pro-state paramilitaries support the status-quo. Basically we [Loyalists] were pro-state, not in the South American sense of being armed by the state or government, despite what *Sinn Fein* thinks, but in the sense that the majority of people wanted to maintain the state. The anti-state faction have an overt political agenda, i.e. they want to replace the state... this constituency is therefore more politicised and so are the anti-state paramilitaries. The majority of pro-state paramilitaries tend to hang up their guns and go home; only a very small minority get involved in politics. Those who originally joined as a cover for their criminality stay on, as they have no alternative outlet in which to operate. This prevents the idealists from immediately hanging up their guns and going home. They must stay on to try and maintain control of their organisation and steer it through the transformation process.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, the road down which these groups travel, while clearly opting for a route that takes them away from political violence and instead into discursive exchange is one stricken with danger: progression can only be made once reaction becomes less endemic and more acute. Professor Steve Bruce, a recognised authority on Loyalist paramilitarism, notes

The UDA and UVF compete with the agencies of the state they claim to defend and their constituency is more receptive to the views of the government. The IRA finds it easier than do the UDA and UVF to persuade its people that racketeering, sectarian assassination campaigns, and intimidation are necessary evils of a just war. Or, more exactly, it does a better job of persuading its people that what may look like gangsterism and mindless violence is no such thing.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, for pro-state terrorists, the absence of a large-scale Republican armed struggle has meant that it is becoming increasingly difficult to persuade the general public that robberies, drug dealing and senseless violence (not to mention internecine strife) are integral components vital for the prosecution of defensive operations.

While we concur with Anthony McIntyre's labelling of certain reactionary elements within Ulster Loyalism as "drugadiers"<sup>4</sup> we cannot agree with other commentators who argue: 'Whether Loyalism could ever be said to have had a political function is dubious. What is certain is that it has none now'.<sup>5</sup> If we are honest we find it no small wonder that the illicit activities of these individuals has proliferated among those working class communities acutely affected by the social and economic deprivation exacerbated by 'the troubles'. Grippled in a perpetual cycle of fear and intimidation it is not difficult to appreciate the disillusionment of those law abiding citizens who wish to escape the tortuous confines of Ulster's troubled history and create better lives for themselves, and for their families. Without doubt the nefarious activities of that criminal element within Loyalism should be unashamedly condemned; but condemnation, by itself, is not explanation. If we are serious about understanding the underlying conditions which have given rise to criminality among some elements within Loyalism then clearly a more tempered analysis is in order.

Although we do not pretend to possess a magic cure for tackling the malady presently afflicting Ulster Loyalism we can nevertheless provide a thorough diagnosis and offer up a possible remedial prescription; suggesting ways in which it might recover from what is commonly regarded by many (including, it has to be said, Progressive Loyalists themselves)

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Billy Mitchell, 17 August 2004

<sup>3</sup> Bruce, Steve *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), p. 279

<sup>4</sup> McIntyre, Anthony 'Political Correct - PC Orde', *The Blanket: A Journal of Protest and Dissent*, 31 January 2004, <http://www.phoblacht.net/pcorde.html>

<sup>5</sup> Langhammer, Mark 'Cutting with the Grain: How to Make Change in the Protestant Community', *Fortnight*, No. 425, (May 2004), p. 15

as an inoperable position. Too often blanket condemnation has been tabled by anti-Loyalist forces in a smash-grab attempt to outmanoeuvre ideological allies and opponents alike: a crude but effective political point-scoring exercise. Understandably this has had a detrimental effect on those pragmatic voices from within the Protestant working class who endeavour to put 'Country before Party' while plumping for a peaceful constitutional accommodation with Irish Nationalism/Republicanism. It is time to subject the Progressive Loyalist balance sheet to more critically rigorous and informed scrutiny.<sup>6</sup>

As Northern Ireland languishes (or, as some would argue, flourishes) under Direct Rule; as the institutions and structures provided for under the Belfast Agreement remain refrigerated; as Ulster's local politicians sit in eager anticipation to administer the last remnants of British rule in Ireland, Progressive Loyalists face a double-edged crisis: should they throw in their lot with their criminal brethren or, alternatively, should they stay the course and opt to transform political culture and society here. The choice is a stark one. For Loyalists to make an informed choice however they need several things to slot into place. First, they need an acknowledgement from the other stakeholders of Ulster's 'peace process' that their political viewpoint is not only valid but worthy of an audience in the higher corridors of power. Second, they need the allocation of resources to aid those schemes aimed at transforming the conflict beyond violence. Lastly, they need the revocation of restrictive legislation (and we mean primarily that which inhibits ex-Prisoners from becoming fully integrated back into society) to enable them to offer a viable alternative to those previously, currently, or, who may perhaps be, destined to engage in paramilitarism. Only by equipping these individuals with the tools necessary for social, political and economic empowerment can we finally begin to entice Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries 'out of the jungle'.

## I Brokering Peace

### Looking for Peace, Preparing for War

The seizure of 300 assault rifles, 4,400 lbs of explosives with detonators and thousands of rounds of ammunition at Teesport, Yorkshire, by Customs Officers in late November 1993<sup>7</sup> exposed the UVF's enhanced capability to obtain the means of inflicting prolonged and devastating destruction on their enemies. There are two retrospective schools of thought on the cache's significance. Some Loyalist 'operators', including the current UVF leadership,<sup>8</sup> contend that they could have met PIRA terror on its own terms and comfortably settled into a 'long war' scenario without much hindrance, while others still harbour doubts on the organisation's capability at that time to match the Provos indefinitely.

The UVF-RHC had always consistently claimed to be engaged in 'counter-terrorist operations' against their enemies. An illustration of this point can be found by trailing through back issues of *Combat* magazine, which are replete with colourful mission debriefs about PIRA personnel targeted, wounded or assassinated.<sup>9</sup> Although this latest arms consignment was captured before it reached the triggermen nothing in the episode (or in the subsequent UVF-RHC statement admitting responsibility) did little to suggest a softening up

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<sup>6</sup> In terms of organisation this pamphlet combines interviewee-led surveys with a general analytical framework. Because of its retrospective nature we have therefore found it necessary to allow our respondents to speak for themselves on a number of occasions and therefore have purposely kept running commentary to a minimum in certain instances.

<sup>7</sup> Bew, Paul and Gordon Gillespie *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999), p. 280

<sup>8</sup> Interview with a Senior UVF Brigade Staff Officer, 9 September 2004

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, the typical formalistic manner in which some of these operations were recorded in the January 1995 issue.

of mindsets among militarists: for as long as IRA violence continued it seemed assured that the UVF would dutifully reciprocate.

To aid their understanding of what was going on within Loyalist paramilitary ranks at this time political commentators are apt to employ a convenient, but highly arbitrary, categorisation device, which places UVF-RHC-PUP members under strict 'hawk' or 'dove' headings. But this is often misleading; as PUP General Secretary Colin Robinson explains

People sometimes try and simplify the thing into hawks and doves, and it doesn't always work like that because people who might have approved of the fact that the Provos were getting a bloody nose at the time would also have realised that that wasn't the way to do business indefinitely and it couldn't go on like that.<sup>10</sup>

While conciliatory dialogue would only be entered into intermediately, and with swords drawn at the ready, the point remains that it *was* willingly entered into. Purportedly a series of 'what if' scenarios were explored, initially between Protestant community workers and members of the Roman Catholic clergy. At a time when the UVF had given consideration to the plan for a bombing campaign south of the Border in the event of joint authority being imposed.<sup>11</sup> It made good strategic sense therefore to tap into a conduit where tentative moves towards dialogue could acquire one a stake in an embryonic 'peace process'; a process which had hitherto been regarded by most Unionists as a British Government-PIRA driven scheme.

### **Assembling the 'Kitchen Cabinet'**

A 'Kitchen Cabinet' was formed around 1989/90 as a means of analysing those nuanced conciliatory communications emanating from enemy trenches. Roy Garland informs us that the Kitchen Cabinet - which in practice was really a political-orientated strategy group, not a paramilitary 'think-tank' - met regularly in the home of Gusty Spence (the veteran Shankill Loyalist who had adjudicated in the formation of the modern UVF in the mid-1960s) and contained both militarists and politicians from the UVF-RHC-PUP camp.<sup>12</sup>

The PUP, insofar as it existed then as a separate entity, was an expression of the political curiosity of certain sections of the UVF up until the early 1990s. According to some leading PUP members the Kitchen Cabinet was not seen as an alternative to the Party or the CLMC; it had no collective ambition to hold onto the levers of power indefinitely.

Because of where the Party came from, the Kitchen Cabinet, which had a major input from elements of the RHC and UVF, there was a naïve perception from those coming into the Party that the kitchen cabinet wanted to run the Party as an Executive, that it wanted to hold the levers of power – the reality was the opposite, it didn't want to hold the power. Yes it wanted to have influence over policy and direction, to make a contribution to discussions – they realised that their skills were not those required to develop the Party, to manage the Party. Yet many Party members felt that the Kitchen Cabinet was running the Party – a clear failure of the Party to communicate between members. This held back the development of the Party – a clear dilemma between the mechanics of running paramilitary organisations and a political party. Most people were aware of the problems faced by the Party but no one acted decisively to remedy the situation. It took years to sort out the issue.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Colin Robinson, 20 August 2004

<sup>11</sup> See a reprint of Hudson's Minutes in Cusack, Jim and Henry McDonald *The UVF* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 2001), pp. 298-299

<sup>12</sup> Garland, Roy *Gusty Spence* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2002), p. 278

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Colin Robinson, 20 August 2004

Although the Kitchen Cabinet held sway over the political strategy which Progressive Loyalism adhered to in the run up to the ceasefires, it was not blind to the need to consult those in the wider Loyalist constituency. To that end private representations by the UDP's Ray Smallwoods were received by Spence: following the formation of the Combined Loyalist Political Alliance (CLPA) these joint meetings between the PUP and UDP became formalised.<sup>14</sup>

Amidst such political efforts consultation was sought with each and every UVF 'Active Service Unit'. While the leadership's peace plan met with 'no real opposition' many politically motivated volunteers still harboured doubts, fears and reservations.<sup>15</sup> This was to be expected given the IRA's cynical last-ditched effort to eliminate key Loyalist personnel in the months immediately prior to their declaration. But the IRA's actions came as no surprise to the UVF leadership who had already alerted volunteers to take precautions and to mount whatever offensive or defensive operations were necessary before the possibility of a Provisional ceasefire:<sup>16</sup> everyone in the UVF-RHC-PUP camp expected a move towards peace to come eventually; the question was when.

A twin track approach was being adopted by the UVF at this time, which combined demonstrative military capability with diplomatic representations posted in the event of peace. The destruction of a Provisional ASU in Cappagh, County Tyrone, was one operation in which the organisation could display the former, while the establishment of contacts, via independent intermediaries, demonstrated their preparedness to move towards the latter.

## **Remembering and Forgetting**

By early 1994 Gusty Spence was reassured in his conviction that he had led those politicians under his tuition along the right road - from a firm and unbinding commitment to senseless violence to a thoroughgoing engagement in political thinking and dialogue. When interviewed in the opening months of 1994 he was optimistic about the future

If the Provos stopped now I think you would see a whole transformation of the political situation. Certainly on the 'prod' side, because in the present state of violence that exists in Northern Ireland no Unionist radical group will be permitted to come forward. The people will always touch for a safe base, the big Unionist Parties. But if there was peace, then radical Parties like the Progressive Unionist Party would come forward. That Party would say that we are experts on poverty, on the working class and regain the honourable name of Unionism.<sup>17</sup>

At the time of Spence's remarks violence on the surface seemed to have little end in sight with many people simply 'battering down the hatches' for yet another routine cycle of murder, mayhem and atrocity. Both Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries were preparing for further offensive operations which began in earnest in March with a series of mortar attacks by the Provisionals on Heathrow Airport. Yet, as alluded to above, preparations of a different kind were underway in the political arena for a relaxation of armed engagement in the claustrophobic world of Loyalist and Republican paramilitary activity. These preparations had one overriding aim – peace.

Such comments indicate to us that even following the devastation caused by the Shankill bombing of October 1993 some loyalists were still prepared to indulge in political utterances

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<sup>14</sup> See Garland *Gusty Spence*, p. 279

<sup>15</sup> Interview with a Senior UVF Brigade Staff Officer, 9 September 2004

<sup>16</sup> Interview with a Senior UVF Brigade Staff Officer, 9 September 2004

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Gusty Spence, quoted in Murphy, David *The Changing Motivations of the Ulster Volunteer Force* (MA Thesis: University of Ulster, 1994), p. 69

aimed at a resolution of the conflict. Throughout 1994 such political exploration was done 'on a damage limitation basis' - and had much to do 'with the sophistication of the UVF and RHC leadership'.<sup>18</sup> Although retaliation was swiftly carried out for atrocities like that on the Shankill - precisely with an attack by the UFF on a bar in Greysteel where customers were mercilessly cut down in a hail of bullets - peace was still kept on track.

On Thursday 13 October 1994 at Fernhill House - 'the Peoples Museum' - peace was finally brought to Northern Ireland. Surely this was true testimony that those in the PUP had indeed undergone a pragmatic transformation whilst in the confines of 'Ulster's hard schools of learning', i.e. the Province's prisons.

Perhaps the fact that Progressive Loyalists were at this time willing to pursue a direction of compromise, not conflict, is the main reason for their most vocal critics having been anti-Agreement Unionists, and not Republicans or Nationalists. As one commentator, writing at the time of the Loyalist cease-fire pointed out,

Meantime, some of the loudest voices within mainstream unionism are variously making remarkably muted responses to the daily minutiae, squabbling sordidly, and stubbornly crying "not an inch". They fiddle while Rome burns, sitting on their hands watching the world and his wife put shoulders to the uphill boulder that is the 'peace process'.<sup>19</sup>

The 'world and his wife' were those men and women who, while not easing up on their principles, did not wish to see a return to the 'sterile and emotional politics' of the past and instead invested their confidence in the peaceful intentions of those emerging pragmatists.

Yet there was a sense that one could detect a glance beyond the immediacy of the ceasefires to a transitional time wherein the conflict could not be fully resolved but at least it could be transformed beyond violence. While the CLMC statement recognised the legacy of the long war with the words:

In all sincerity, we offer to the loved ones of all innocent victims over the past twenty years, abject and true remorse. No words of ours will compensate for the intolerable suffering they have undergone during the conflict.

There was nevertheless, at this early stage, echoes of a pressing need to engage in a conflict transformation process which would arguably have to be implemented for any future political dispensation to retain any kind of positive momentum.

Let us firmly resolve to respect our differing views of freedom, culture and aspiration and never again permit our political circumstances to degenerate into bloody warfare. We are on the threshold of a new and exciting beginning with our battles in future being political battles, fought on the side of honest, decency and democracy against the negativity of mistrust, misunderstanding and malevolence, so that, together, we can bring forth a wholesome society in which our children, and their children, will know the meaning of true peace.

When Loyalists finally sent a delegation to meet with Government *apparatchiks* in January 1995 the realisation that a resolution to the conflict could never realistically be accomplished in the short or medium terms was pressed home; the need to transform the conflict was to be where political priorities should lie.

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Colin Robinson, 20 August 2004

<sup>19</sup> Holloway, David 'Beyond the Fife and Gun' in *Fortnight*, November 1994, No. 333, p. 17

Also worth mentioning here is the discipline of the UVF in holding to the ‘no first strike policy’ against Republicans has been a major factor in permitting Progressive Loyalists to capture and hold the high moral ground; regardless of whether that fact is universally recognised by the general public. For example it was a key component following the IRA ‘spectaculars’ at Canary Wharf and Thiepval Barracks, and it was also a vital factor during the bloody cycle of murder and mayhem unleashed by some sections of Loyalism. The exclusion of *Sinn Fein* and the UDP from the talks process spurred the British Government into an obdurate stance against paramilitary violence, a prohibitive stance moreover that was only offset by the electoral victory of the British Labour Party in May 1997.

### **Thoughts on the 1994 Ceasefires: A Retrospective Analysis from the UVF**

In an interview with a senior member of UVF Brigade Command, conducted specifically for this pamphlet, several important issues were raised on the origins of the UVF Ceasefire and its implications for the embryonic ‘peace process’. It appears here in an abridged format because of note-taking restrictions:

In the period 1989-90 there had been a number of contacts between the leadership of the UVF and nationalist community representatives, orchestrated in the main via Protestant community workers. The message coming back from contacts on ‘the other side’ was that an end to the conflict was in sight.

The debate and information flow between the community workers on both sides was undertaken to find out exactly what was going on in Republican circles. The most important contact was Fr. Alec Reid who initially met with Protestant clergy, who in turn contacted the Protestant community workers. A series of ‘what if’ scenarios were explored, e.g. ‘if you stop killing us, then we will stop killing you’ – a trade off. This offer was rejected by the UVF as one-sided and unfair because it was purely a ‘counter terrorist outfit’ so if PIRA attacked any aspect of the state forces then it was seen as an attack on all.

The Kitchen Cabinet was formed in around this period to analyse the information coming in from the various sources. A concern at the time was for Progressive Loyalists to make sure their analysis was sound because they felt that it was always Loyalists who were blamed for starting the conflict – they therefore needed to be at the head of the game for finishing it.

A series of discussions and consultations was initiated by the UVF leadership with its grass roots to debate the potential for calling a unilateral ceasefire. In the absence of party politics connected to the UVF Robin Eames was asked by the leadership to talk to the British Government – effectively he was given the role of keeping his eye on the bigger picture. A unilateral ceasefire was announced in April 1991 to enhance the fortunes of the Brooke Talks which had followed on from Peter Brooke’s declaration in 1990 that Britain no longer had any selfish economic or strategic interest in Northern Ireland – a statement seen as a key cue for the republican movement to engage in negotiations. The Brooke message (November 1990) in relation to no strategic self-interest was gauged by the UVF as a message to the IRA to stop the military campaign –and not about the prospect of a British withdrawal.

The reaction of the PIRA was vital to the maintenance of the UVF ceasefire. The response was clear. The PIRA for perhaps the first time in the conflict entered Protestant estates to carry out operations (Donacloney, Banbridge, etc.). As a result the UVF returned to its counter terrorist position. In its analysis of the ceasefire and its (lack of) impact the UVF considered itself well ahead of the PIRA thinking. The Kitchen Cabinet continued to meet and analyse the information being generated through the range of sources during the period. The CLMC decided at this time that a political aspect was needed i.e. the ceasefire had given an opportunity to the main Unionist political parties which they had failed miserably to capitalise on. The CLMC wanted its own political representatives to engage at all levels from

the ground up with a watching brief to be taken by the UVF and UDA leaderships in partnership. Alec Reid continued to feed information through for analysis, and engagements continued between the various community workers. The Protestant community representatives were told to step up the meetings as there was a growing sense of unease at the time that a 'sell-out' or secret deal was being put together.

The UVF at this time was convinced that the PIRA was coming to the end of its operational abilities – it had killed 23 soldiers at Warrenpoint (27 September, 1979), it had attacked the British Cabinet (e.g., Brighton, 1984), it had killed Royalty (27 August, 1979) and still the British state showed no sign of disengaging. PIRA could do no more militarily; it was at full stretch whilst at the same time the UVF and Loyalism in general was becoming much more fine-tuned in its military capability. The credo remained unaltered 'Loyalists are the British presence in Northern Ireland, not the British Army; we can not be bombed into a United Ireland'.

According to our interviewee a 'three-pronged approach was employed at this time', involving: -

1. The political alliance (PUP/politicos)
2. The CLMC
3. The UVF constituency

The political representatives continued to meet everyone possible. The CLMC met political parties, academics, focussing on ensuring there was no 'secret deal' in the background. The community workers continued to engage in information sharing. UVF personnel were regularly consulted and kept up to date, they knew changes were happening and were reassured on the absence of any secret deal.

In the lead up to 1994 the CLMC issued six principles and in return was given assurances that these would be safe.

1. There must be no diminution of Northern Ireland's position as an integral part of the United Kingdom whose paramount responsibility is the morale and physical well-being of all its citizens.
2. There must be no dilution of the democratic procedure through which the rights of self-determination of the people of Northern Ireland are guaranteed.
3. We defend the right of anyone or group to seek constitutional change by democratic, legitimate and peaceful means.
4. We recognise and respect the rights and aspirations of all who abide by the Law regardless of religious, cultural, national or political inclinations.
5. We are dedicated to a written Constitution and Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland wherein would be enshrined stringent safeguards for individuals, associations and minorities.
6. Structures should be devised whereby elected representatives, North and South, could work together, without interference in each other's internal affairs, for the economic betterment and the fostering of good neighbourly relations between both parts of Ireland.

Every UVF unit was consulted and it was outlined during the interview that 'there was no real opposition in the ranks, some worries and some scepticism but no outright opposition'. The message was clear; the UVF is a counter terrorist outfit, if PIRA aggression stops then the UVF have no military role to play. The next stage would be a political one. This message was not only conveyed to and from the ranks but was also sent out to the Nationalist community. When the PIRA called its ceasefire it proved that the analysis of the UVF leadership had been correct which helped to lend it credibility.

It was strongly emphasised to the interviewer that all the events which led up to the ceasefire were viewed and analysed in purely military terms by the UVF and CLMC. The UVF took a 'county first' attitude to events and negotiations as they unfolded.

The political developments took place during a period when the Loyalist military response had become much more focussed, 'not as a result of collusion but as a result of the public information made available by the series of super grass trials in the 1980s which ensured that all the key players from all the organisations were in the public domain. PIRA knew this and that was a key factor in bringing them to the negotiating table. The PIRA was keeping its eye on the UVF with regards its movement to a ceasefire position; it was more concerned with UVF than the British State'. In analysing and reviewing the period the present UVF leadership is convinced that the information coming into the leadership from its three pronged strategy ensured the UVF thinking continued to develop ahead of that in the PIRA leadership.

At all times the lead up to, and management of, the Loyalist ceasefire was in the hands of the CLMC and not the Kitchen Cabinet, the political representatives or the community representatives whose role was limited to presenting information for analysis. So long as there were no strings attached to the PIRA ceasefire and there was no going back of the six principles, then the UVF was always going to respond positively to the PIRA ceasefire. From this militarist viewpoint the only political consideration was the constitutional position and the form of any internal political arrangements was a matter for the people of Northern Ireland.

Following the announcement of the ceasefire for the majority of UVF personnel the war was over and it was a case of going back to work. The future could be left in the hands of the new loyalist political representatives. The UVF leadership was very keen to have its own political representatives engaging with the body politic rather than leaving political direction to the mainstream Unionist parties. The unity of the CLMC was reflected in the fact that the PUP and UDP held weekly liaison meetings in the immediate post-ceasefire period.

By the time of the Canary Wharf bomb (February, 1996) 'we were confident we could hold the ceasefire'. Then the bomb in Thiepval Barracks, Lisburn (October 1996) – 'we had great difficulty in holding the ceasefire' but the CLMC was prepared to wait. The feedback from the nationalist community and political representatives indicated that the PIRA was not recommencing the conflict, indeed that there were moves by PIRA to go back on ceasefire. The constitutional position was not deemed to be under threat.

With the status quo ensured confidence grew and this was reflected in the UVF grass roots where there was a belief that there was no need to return to the conflict. Not everything was judged to be moving in favour of Loyalism and Unionism however, and in the talks which led up to the Belfast Agreement the UVF issued words of caution to the PUP because it was increasingly concerned that the Agreement was not a good deal for unionism and that there "would be pain down the road" – the PUP was asked not to 'talk up' the deal. The UVF leadership's analysis of political developments after 1998 is that 'the peace process has been a nightmare for Loyalism'. After the Agreement there were more consultations on the ground to further explain the implication to all personnel, with the clear instruction to volunteers that in the vote to follow they could vote as they wished.

The UVF leadership has been disappointed with the sidelining of the PUP

"Which has gone from a position of strength to one where it is excluded from talks and demonised; nobody wants to talk about the bread and butter issues facing the working class. Our message to the Government is that we will not be criminalised. We have the same volume of support in our community as the IRA; it's just that this support does not translate

into votes for the PUP. We want to become fully integrated into the community, including our ex-prisoners and our ex-combatants.

“Looking to the future there is a realisation that for all the main organisations the conflict is over and that there will be no more attacks on the state following 9/11. The problem is that in Northern Ireland sectarianism is on the increase in all sections of society. *Sinn Fein* continues to lead attacks on Protestant culture and parades – this is why they set up the residents groups – and young loyalist bandsmen are now very angry and as a result more flags are going up in defiance. *Sinn Fein* is now seeking an all out victory and the removal of British symbolism and heritage. They have now unleashed a new kind of sectarianism, a hatred that is worse than ever. The greening of areas of Belfast only adds to the fear in working class districts”.

In concluding the interview the UVF insisted that it still maintains, what it calls, ‘a watching brief’ and has no wish to return to conflict.

## II Policing the Peace

### The PUP: Principles, Policies and Prospects

From the announcement of the ceasefires in late 1994 the PUP has been striving tirelessly to ‘police the peace’, but their task has been fraught with many pitfalls. They have encountered extreme danger along the way and suffered tremendous casualties. For a politician beyond these shores it would be difficult, maybe even impossible, to fully appreciate the circumstances of his Northern Ireland counterpart. The recent UDA-UVF feud, which broke out in August 2000, and led to a catalogue of deaths, certainly provides ample evidence that the PUP faces an uphill struggle in transforming the mindsets of those working-class Protestants who have resisted change. The feud, if it did nothing else, demonstrated that not all working class Loyalists were prepared to fall into line behind the UVF-RHC-PUP peace strategy. However, away from the harsh reality of practical Loyalist political life, positive efforts have been made to examine the theoretical underbelly of the Progressive Loyalist cause.

The *Principles of Loyalism*, an internal UVF-RHC-PUP discussion paper, penned by Billy Mitchell in 2002, is the first document to seriously reflect upon Loyalism as a political creed. It is a work grounded in the principles of the Solemn League and Covenant, considered by many historians to be the birth certificate of modern Ulster. Although the *Principles* are largely theory-driven they do make a connection with community-level practitioners. And rather than being a monochrome work of historical curiosity, then, the *Principles* seek to marry theory and practice, and to imbibe a genuine sense of historical and cultural legitimacy into the Protestant working class identity, all at a time when cultural yearning in sections of Loyalism and Unionism has been undermined by the somewhat unwelcome trend towards manufactured language and culture.

The *Principles of Loyalism* is ‘an attempt to put forward the key elements of the loyalist cause that were established by the founding fathers of unionism at the time of the Home Rule crisis’.<sup>20</sup> Loyalists, the document claims, ‘needs a set of core principles’<sup>21</sup> extracted from a past and made applicable to the present and future. Although we do not have the luxury to place the Loyalist political philosophy on any kind of intellectual dissecting table we can make some relevant observations on the *Principles* themselves and, more importantly, on how these translate into practice.

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<sup>20</sup> *Principles of Loyalism*, p. 4

<sup>21</sup> *Principles of Loyalism*, p. 4

It is fashionable amongst historians to engage in a revision of the historical record as new evidence is unearthed about some past event, process or legacy, which has been subjected to manifold interpretations. What Progressive Loyalists have attempted to do with the *Principles* is to capture a past ideal (or set of ideals) and to superimpose them onto one that is more positive and conducive to creativity.

Mainstream Unionists, Nationalists and Republicans have all engaged one another in dialogue for generations. And while all are persuaded by the legitimacy of their respective political ideologies Loyalism has been less marked by a sense of confidence about its heritage: the *Principles* are an attempt to remedy that. Progressive Loyalists, it seems, have entered into an ideological battle to assert their claim to historical and cultural lineage long contested in the annals of Irish history.

*The Principles* demonstrate that the past can be a bankable commodity and can be used to good effect in our present day and age - so much so that they have been operationalised as a heuristic device to stimulate debate within progressive cadres. While Mitchell's reappraisal of the *Principles* may elicit the charge that they hark back to old-fashioned values, more careful reading suggests the contrary. His trumpeting of a new social agenda grounded in a proven track record of nationalised public services is not so much revolutionary socialist as corporate socialist; with the latter at one time, of course, advocated by the British Labour Party. Dugald McCullough reinforced the view that recognition must be conferred on the rights of the Protestant working class to hold their own distinctive identity

There is a way in which (I think) Protestant people need to do that [assert their identity], particularly working class Protestant people, because every political analysis that I ever read as a young man - any socialist or communist or left wing view - it always left out the Protestant working class as some kind of "oh well, yeah, well, they just have to lie on the sandbank as history moves on and they just flap for a while and then die"... That is their fate according to any socialist analysis you like. And that is not good enough really. So the leadership is required for people to gather and provide for themselves their own definition of who they are, which they can hold with respect. And that definition has to reach back into their traditions and has to reach forward into their future - and the same for the PUP. The kind of leadership that has been provided was one that says 'it's okay to be who we are; and it's actually okay, in a way, to have done the things we done in the name of [our cause], but at the same time it's not okay.'<sup>22</sup>

One suspects that the *Principles* were born out of a frustration with the division presently besetting Ulster Unionism/Loyalism. They certainly point to an attempt to distinguish political violence - as 'an extension of political resistance by other means' - from other more corrupt forms of paramilitary activity. Thus

The UVF and RHC as organisations, believe that involvement in the illicit drugs trade is incompatible with the principles of Loyalism and neither organisation is involved in, nor endorses, such activities. It is impossible to guarantee that a small minority of members of these organisations will never engage in such activities as individuals. Where this does happen the individuals concerned receive no succour or support from their organisations and will be subject to internal disciplinary procedures and, where appropriate, be made amenable to the due process of law.<sup>23</sup>

There is no doubting the earnestness of the official line outlined above, but it is impossible to tally words with deeds. Undeniably many 'volunteers' accumulate a significant profit from

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Dugald McCullough, 31 August 2004

<sup>23</sup> *Principles of Loyalism*, pp. 49-50

such illegal activity; some may even openly enjoy lavish lifestyles because of it. But when mere profiteering surpasses 'feeding the mouths' of a volunteer's family it is difficult for the public to regard these organisations as any sort of vanguard for the protection of Protestant working class lives or property; for corruption cannot and can never be a substitute for lawful authority. While Progressive Loyalists may deplore such nefarious acts, and tolerate them only because they are not indicative of the 'middle-management' upwards, they do persist and are a sign of our modern age. In a liberal democratic society, with a free market economy, demand will therefore always drive supply.

### **The PUP: Membership and Organisation**

In the wake of the ceasefire declarations the Party became more attractive to potential new members and consequently found itself under immense pressure to expand its organisational structure across Northern Ireland. But, as Colin Robinson pointed out, developing the membership base of the PUP was by no means an uncomplicated task

The Party at this time did have difficulty in coping with the influx of new members. Two new branches were founded in East Belfast – Victoria and Pottinger – where members included former members of the NILP. The ceasefires definitely opened up political possibilities and lots of people flooded into the party that would never have got involved in politics before. It's disappointing now to realise that a lot of those people have since drifted away from the Party, particularly after the Belfast Agreement. Perhaps in the period after the ceasefires, we were all too enthusiastic, maybe we took on members who were not best suited to the Party, but the momentum was genuine, perhaps some of those people were better suited to community development work. For them, the politics of the Party was not as interesting as the community development. For others the Party was more about ego trips and vanity; they soon drifted away. The Party was not equipped to deal with such quick expansion the more mundane aspects of developing a Party in terms of constitutions and structures were not in place.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly Dawn Purvis's recollection was that '1995-1996 saw a rush of applications to the Party for membership. It was clear at the time that the Party was not ready for all the new members'.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, in terms of structures and administration, no induction programme yet existed for new members – but in any event some had joined the Party for opportunistic reasons; 'glory hunters' were not uncommon. Despite this the period up to 1998 was one in which 'the PUP rode the crest of a wave' according to Purvis.

While policing a still fragile peace it was becoming increasingly more obvious that with most attention directed towards the bigger peace project the PUP 'forgot' to address the more mundane issues of Party structures and systems. Although an advanced blueprint was being drawn up in the 1990s to develop the branch structure it never left the draughtsman's table. In fact it was 2002 (eight years after the ceasefires) before a re-organisation process finally began, which saw a new Executive and leadership structure installed. This rationalisation process, although more transparent, led invariably to a reduction in membership - from approximately 700 in 1996-7 to a current figure close to 200 in 2004.

It could be said, then, that the lead up to the Belfast Agreement was a 'galvanising period' for the Party, a period when many discussions took place between different hues of Loyalism throughout the Province; with the 'politicos' dedicating their time to trying to sell a political deal to those with a more 'militarist' outlook. This was a time when politics was in the ascendancy within Loyalism, a time seen by many of those involved as the perfect

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Colin Robinson, 20 August 2004

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Dawn Purvis, 23 August 2004

opportunity to transform the lives of their fellow citizens. It produced a sense of political excitement, the allure of the 'end game', a time when a spirit of compromise between the Protestant and Catholic communal blocs seemed possible. The period after the Agreement quickly brought a sense that not everything was being delivered. Devolution, while working, was not all that effective. The two PUP MLAs, while they could exert some influence were already and increasingly peripheral to the body politic, the system was viewed by activists as working against the Party.

Billy Hutchinson is convinced that the lead up period to the Belfast Agreement provided ample evidence that not only was the PUP being sidelined but that the UUP and the British Government were already engaged in a campaign to destroy any influence they might accrue.

I asked [Tony] Blair on a number of occasions how he was going to engage with Loyalism; to help it come out of the jungle. He had sent his aides to work with Republicans. Where was the same process for Loyalism? He never actually delivered on this; they did not send anyone to work with us. This begs the question... and I warned him that just because the Provos do something Loyalists will not necessarily do the same. We tried to tell him our difficulty is not with the weapons, it's with the mindsets.<sup>26</sup>

In the end people became disillusioned by both the Agreement's failure to deliver and with *Sinn Fein's* triumphalist approach. The sense of frustration convinced many people that perhaps the DUP were right all along.

With the added problems now generated by a breakdown in the Provo ceasefire great strain was placed on both the Party and the movement as a whole: the PUP can at least have some accolades bestowed on it for holding the Loyalist ceasefire. However this period also convinced many people that the Provos were no longer as effective as they had been in their prime. There was a general feeling that the Provos could not sustain an indefinite campaign; that they would have to go back on ceasefire; back to politics. A feeling held by most grassroots Unionists; that was consequently vindicated within a matter of months when the campaign was terminated.

There can be little doubt that a reinstatement of the Provisional's ceasefire served to boost morale within Progressive Loyalist ranks. Colin Robinson summed up the buoyant mood prevalent in the run-up and aftermath of the signing of the Agreement

You could characterise the 1990s thus: after the 1994 ceasefires there was a feeling within militant Loyalism that 'we had won'. In 1998 the spirit was more one of compromise; to give politics a chance; we had all to work together for a solution. From very early days the inability of the Unionist Party and *Sinn Fein* to deliver undermined the Agreement. The PUP worked very hard for the Agreement..... went head to head with the DUP on occasions which was difficult. Many people in the Party suffered emotional strain. It is not easy to constantly be referred to as 'Judas' and 'traitor'.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from the actions of the DUP and their supporters the Party's standing among its support-base was further undermined by the ineffectiveness of the Ulster Unionist Party to deliver the peace dividends promised to the people of Northern Ireland. This led directly to considerable disillusionment among the wider UVF-RHC-PUP constituency. Colin Robinson contends that the PUP lost a lot of members when it became obvious that the GFA failed to deliver what most people thought was owed to them: a stake in the political process.

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Billy Hutchinson, 20 September 2004

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Colin Robinson, 20 August 2004

In the period following the GFA when devolution was seen as ineffective. They were seen as peripheral to what was going on because of the way business was done. For all those reasons a lot of people thought that the DUP were right.<sup>28</sup>

This constituency-wide despondency has a long genesis. In fact Plum Smith traced the attitude between Loyalism and Unionism in the early 1990s to the refusal by mainstream Unionists to acknowledge the efforts undertaken by the Combined Loyalist Military Command to create space for political dialogue to emerge

**Plum Smith:** “In the early 1990s the CLMC had just been formed and there was a feeling within Loyalism at that time that sooner or later the violence would have to brought to an end; that the conflict had to have a closure. The CLMC called a ceasefire during the Brooke Talks [1991] to provide the space for meaningful dialogue, with a view to a possible settlement. Loyalism had reached a point where it realised an end game was possible, but it had yet to figure out how the game would be played. A key problem during the ceasefire was that the move received no reciprocal gesture from mainstream unionism; neither the UUP nor DUP felt the need to engage with Loyalism. That’s when the CLMC decided that it would no longer have the mainstream unionist parties speaking on its behalf - we would have our own political representation.

“We then embarked on a series of discussions - we met trade unions and other political parties – there was also an agreement with the CLMC that there would be one representative from each organisation sitting in on the talks, ‘a watching brief’. So the talks were well advanced before 1994, in future then when the CLMC wanted to say anything, it used the ‘politicos’ as their representatives.

“Leading up to the ceasefires there was the Shankill bomb (1993), a period when numerous people were murdered, but when the PIRA called its ceasefire we knew it would be only a matter of time before we called ours. The ceasefire document was typed up in EPIC; it was taken round the country for a series of discussions with three main groups (1) the prisoners – regular discussions were held over the period, (2) the combatants outside all over the country and (3) our own people. All groups were kept abreast of developments. Gusty insisted on the word ‘remorse’ being included in the statement.

“When the Brooke talks failed and people here resented the politicians for failing to take the chance, we decided that it was up to ourselves to instigate a process – all the Loyalist politicians (Davy Adams had replaced Smallwoods after he was shot by PIRA) proved themselves very able; could handle the highest political talks – Loyalism was confident, and happy to engage with governments, etc. at the highest level. But it was our expectation that the war was over and that a political settlement was the next stage; the conflict was to be put to rest.

“Loyalists wanted to have their own identity, not just a junior partner within unionism, a progressive working class version of Unionism containing many ex-combatants with a real desire to build peace – men who had lost comrades in the war.

“At the preliminary talks in Stormont I remember thinking this was the first time working class loyalists had been in the place. The faceless civil servants who had been hiding away for 30 years were very nervous even meeting us. We took it in our stride; we were not overawed. It was then about January 1995 we had our first meeting with a Minister, effectively we were gaining full recognition as people who could do business. This helped maintain and develop momentum for the UDP and PUP – the two parties usually formed joint delegations, worked very closely together at this stage. Only when the two parties went before the electorate seeking a mandate did the parties effectively go into competition, although still with a good working relationship.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Colin Robinson, 20 August 2004

“When we got elected to the Forum and to the Talks that gave a further boost to the confidence of the loyalist community – but on reflection we held an inflated position at the time because – in the absence of the DUP, the PUP was needed to ensure unionist consensus, effectively the PUP held the balance to ensure 52% unionist support. This leverage was used to the maximum as we had the power to pull the whole thing down, Trimble needed us. This explains how the PUP got such a good deal on the prisoner release issue. The PUP also insisted in having six seats in each electoral area because there was a genuine fear that only five would bar any PUP representatives getting elected.

“After the signing of the Agreement there was still a feeling that the PUP was effective politically but the problem was that very quickly pro-Agreement unionism walked away from the Agreement, on issues like prisoner releases despite it being part of the Agreement, the anti-Agreement forces played up the emotional issues (RUC name, prisoners vs. victims). Where the Agreement went wrong was in its implementation - “an Agreement endorsed by the many, enjoyed by the few”.

“A decisive aspect of this poor implementation is the growing influence of Tony Blair – when he started to interfere. It is my belief that Mo Mowlam was the best Secretary of State we had (she quickly put all the key players in their place), chauvinism within unionism couldn’t handle the fact a woman was in charge, the first mistakes in the implementation was when Trimble starting going over Mowlam’s head direct to Blair and Blair listened, he effectively undermined her authority – the effect was that the SDLP/SF then started dealing directly with the *Taoiseach* - the custodians of the Agreement were all the parties but now only the major parties were players with the respective governments- the DUP were still out of the loop.

“The smaller parties were then increasingly sidelined, hence the Agreement started to unravel – leading up to the fiasco of Weston Park (July 2001) and numerous developments which were outside the Agreement. That’s were it started going wrong. At Weston Park they brought the UUP and SDLP over on the Monday for two days of serious talks, then brought the smaller parties over on the Wednesday for an hour. That’s why we walked out of Weston Park – no point us being there. It was the same in Hillsborough (March 2003) – they brought us, the WC and Alliance there but it was pointless – it was a smokescreen – in effect the SDLP, SF and UUP were making deals which were outside the Agreement.

“The peace was never in question, despite the sidelining of the PUP. But the Agreement was under threat after this period. Deals made outside the Agreement, e.g. ‘on the runs’ undermine it - and we are getting nothing - today it is very difficult for us to go out and sell the Agreement because of the way it has been implemented. SF is seen as getting ‘sweeties’ for everything and Loyalism is getting nothing”.<sup>29</sup>

However this was a future largely unforeseen in the euphoric days of the immediate post-ceasefire period. It was recognised, somewhat belatedly, that Ulster Loyalism had come a long way from its violent paramilitary campaign against its main ideological opponent: the Provisional IRA. But Loyalism’s route to the negotiation table had not been arrived at by accident. Days, even years, of tortuously slow progress towards reaching a peaceful co-existence with Irish Nationalism had been set in train since the early days of the conflict. Behind-the-scenes exploratory dialogue between former paramilitary ‘operators’, who had rejected their violent past for the sake of peace, complimented military action on the streets. Now Loyalism was pursuing a purely political path. Yet the trouble remains for Loyalism that even with all the contribution to progress it has made in its important maintenance work it still cannot translate this into voter recognition. Plum Smith summed this up well when he said

“Electurally Loyalism never managed to convert its military might into electoral strength – same as issue of ex-prisoners, we find it much more difficult to be accepted in our own community than republicans do in theirs, they are accepted – our acceptance is limited to

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Plum Smith, 25 August 2004

working class areas, middle unionism see me as the same as an ex-IRA prisoner, we find it very difficult. That's why it is so difficult to get elected.

“The genesis of the problems for the loyalist family was when the UDP failed to get elected representatives; it was clear at the time that this was a major setback. Once they did not get elected to the Assembly their day was gone, the PUP was the sole voice of Loyalism which made it difficult for the PUP. The UDP quickly disintegrated and soon the UDA became avowedly anti-Agreement – proof that you need more than a pro-Agreement stance to get elected.

“Loyalism cannot be reconstructed – too much has happened since. I was at a meeting in Fernhill House about six months ago – the last time I walked up that road was to announce the ceasefire and the world's press was there, Loyalism was on a high, six months ago there was no-one. [It was] clear we are moving backwards – the reasons are clear enough – gangsters, drugs... resulting in all Loyalists being viewed in similar vein. That image... has really damaged political Loyalism”.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Feud and the Fury**

Hostility between loyalist paramilitary groupings is not a novel phenomenon, nor is it an acute disposition afflicting only those claiming lineage and legitimacy from the Unionist political creed.<sup>31</sup> The latest round of bloodletting, which drenched East Belfast and North Down back in May 2004, can be traced conveniently to a short-term rupture in relations between the UVF and LVF, which quickly manifested itself in armed attacks against rival protagonists. The scope for fatalities to reach double figures was only averted by the valiant efforts of two local community representatives, Mervyn Gibson and Sammy Douglas, and the levelheaded restraint displayed by those protagonists recognising the futility of their actions.<sup>32</sup>

Longer-term factors date from a split in the mid-Ulster UVF in 1996 when Billy Wright broke ranks and turned his back on the Shankill UVF leadership. The LVF was formed by rural-based loyalists antipathetic to republican olive branch politics and street-level agitation during the Province's marching season. Loyalism, like republicanism, then, has had its fair share of splits, feuds and *coup d'états* over the past decade. Perhaps the least analysed ramifications of this violence are the detrimental effects militarist actions have had on attempts by politicians to transform the conflict onto a more creative and positive interface.

That some sort of cohesive politico-militarist command dictates what direction loyalist paramilitary activity should ultimately follow could be discounted as illusory. Likewise, vulgar stereotypes, such as those projected by the media, militate against genuine grassroots efforts to introduce checks and balances on paramilitary activity. Bottom up initiatives, like the exemplary restorative justice model initiated by the Greater Shankill Alternatives programme or the efforts of EPIC to deter young loyalists from choosing paramilitarism as a conscious career pathway, are greatly thwarted, on the one hand by lack of resources and by opposition from mainstream unionist politicians and, on the other hand by the actions of a tiny minority of militarists eager to “up the ante” or fend off deliberate incursions into some Protestant working class estates. Local media attempts – which ignore the positive attempts to transform loyalism and adhere to the code of blanket criminalisation - are viewed by many working class Protestants as punishment for the actions of unruly gangs.

Why punish the Protestant working class generally, and progressive loyalist elements in particular, for the actions of a small minority who do not hold the safety and security of their

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Plum Smith, 25 August 2004

<sup>31</sup> For an historical summary of Loyalist Feuding see Bruce, Steve *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), particularly, pp. 124-127

<sup>32</sup> *The Observer*, 30 May, 2004

fellow citizens at heart? Personality clashes - reinforced with the guns and ammunition held in reserve for a return by republicans to armed struggle (if such a thing were a realistic possibility) - do much to harm the profile of these disadvantaged communities, especially when recent demographic changes suggest the dispersal of inner city Protestants to the Province's more religiously homogeneous outlying districts.

### **Militarists and Politicos: An Uneasy Relationship?**

To retain their operational effectiveness military organisations, of whatever type (whether pro or anti-State) depend very much on the self-discipline of their combatants during times of peace just as much as they do during times of war. Events unfolding since last November's unsanctioned killing of a man in Ballyclare point to an acute discipline problem within UVF ranks, which, had it been left to fester, had the potential to destabilise the positive political advancement made by Progressive Loyalism since 1994. The fact that effective disciplinary action was taken swiftly suggests that the leadership is determined to address issues of indiscipline within the ranks.

The loose autonomous structure that permits an individual volunteer to settle a personal score with UVF war material certainly shores up difficulties for Battalion-level commanders, but it has broader ramifications for the UVF-RHC-PUP constituency than this. While Brigade Staff Officers may lament about the media's speculation over drug dealing and other criminal activities attributable to some members their organisation, these acts of violence nevertheless continue to send out mixed signals to the Protestant working class, which in turn has a much more immediate debilitating effect on the credibility of the UVF's politico partners. Keeping a tight leash on one's own troops is a good indication about how effective one can be in battle. Ambidexterity is, therefore, as much a necessity for managing an army as it is for a political party - even though it has to be said that both differ substantially in terms of organisational structure, goals and membership size. While armies are generally autocratic, political parties are nominally democratic and enjoy none of the secrecy coveted by armed organisations.

For a paramilitary organisation, especially one priding itself on a greater degree of military discipline than its Loyalist counterparts, internal rules oftentimes reflect external realities. To maintain a united front in the face of enemy adversity (not to mention the restlessness and fatigue which can sometimes be generated among one's own troops) is a dubious enterprise which must be handled delicately; to maintain a united front during relative peace is proving increasingly difficult for the UVF leadership. But, as Billy Mitchell pointed out to us, this is a difficulty that is recognised and is being addressed, and can be overcome if the leadership is given the right kind of support and encouragement.

The ushering in of a new political and socio-economic dispensation for the Protestant working class can only happen with the support of a much wider working class constituency than is presently conflated under the paramilitary umbrella.

Politically, it may not be too presumptuous to suppose that Raymond McCord's intervention on an anti-paramilitary crusade ticket inflicted minor damage on Billy Hutchinson's electoral chances in the 2003 Northern Ireland Assembly contest for North Belfast. But McCord's 218 votes did little to offset the consolidation of support for the DUP and Sinn Fein. Elsewhere results were just as disappointing. Progressive Unionists managed to pool 8,032 first preference votes (1.16%) with only Ervine and Hutchinson breaking into four figures. In 1998 PUP candidates attained 20,634 votes (2.55%).

Immediate factors for the PUP's horrendous performance are not difficult to surmise: the UVF-linked assassination in Ballyclare (mentioned above) sickened many people and almost certainly contributed to a poor showing by the PUP in East Antrim and further afield.

Inevitably there were some sections of the Protestant working class that felt emboldened enough to abandon any notion of voting PUP because, for them at least, there is no 'real' distinction between the politicians and their militarist comrades. Mark Langhammer is not totally misleading when he claims that 'in all instances, the privacy of the polls is the only place where working class Protestants can punish paramilitaries. They never fail to take the opportunity do so.'<sup>33</sup> Billy Mitchell agrees, but thinks it unfortunate that those who are being punished are the only ones who are making any effort to work for the changes that Mark Langhammer desires.

However, while it did not marginally reduce Progressive Loyalist efforts to secure support from its core constituency it did, however, increase the likelihood that middleclass unionists who may have been attracted by the presence of those candidates from professional backgrounds (like for instance Deputy Leader David Rose) abandoning any radical notions they may have temporarily harboured.

### III Losing the Peace?

#### The IMC Report: Content and Implications

*Sinn Fein* and PUP protestations over the IMC's findings have been distinguished by their intensity. Allegations that Provo, UVF and RHC personnel are engaged in criminal profiteering will come as no surprise to middle of the road Unionists or their Nationalist counterparts. There is a prevalent feeling among those residing in the leafy suburbs that the sole *raison d'être* of republican and loyalist paramilitary organisations nowadays is a commitment to ordinary decent crime. To the IMC's architects paramilitary groups are quite simply leeching onto the communities they purport to represent.

To say that paramilitaries are essentially organised criminal gangs, however, misses the point. This is just too reductionist an argument to be taken seriously and decontextualises the conditions which gave rise to paramilitary activity in the first place. It has to be conceded that financially paramilitary bookkeepers have failed to balance their accounts during relative peace. However, even though some Loyalist and Republican volunteers have made the metamorphic switch to mercenaries 'loyal to the half crown', a great many more remain involved for idealistic reasons and are determined to facilitate the transition from violence to democratic exchange.

Militarists can generally be grouped under three principal headings. Firstly, there is 'the volunteer.' An individual susceptible to the instant beck and call of the custodians of his cause; one often regarded by fellow loyalists as a purist, an idealist; someone who does what he does out of hardy patriotic spirit. Then, secondly, there is 'the mercenary;' an individual who engages in paramilitary activity because of a self-deluding prenuptial agreement which stipulates that doughty commitment to *the cause* is secondary only to the material profit generated by its pursuit. Lastly, there is the 'psychopath' - an individual takes particular delight in his indiscriminate pastime of eliminating perceived enemies - real or imaginary - while clinging narrowly to a foolish belief in providence.

Nefarious criminal and violent acts damage the standing of militarists among local communities from which they claim an affinity. Likewise politicians are viewed as duplicitous front men - covering up for the Mafiosi-type activities of their militarist 'partners'. Local people do not always distinguish between the idealist and the mercenary, between the progressive and the redneck. Greater autonomy can only come from detaching further from

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<sup>33</sup> Langhammer 'Cutting with the Grain: How to Make Change in the Protestant Community', p. 15

the paramilitary sphere of influence. An abandonment of Battalion level politics for constituency level politics has to be the way forward for Progressive Unionism if it is to attract more floating voters in future electoral contests. Not a clear-cut break – that would never sell among grass roots activists or their supporters – but a commitment to move away from what many see as Battalion level politics in the medium term. It has to be realised that ‘barrack-room comradeship’ can only carry militarists and politicians so far.

In its response to the IMC Report the PUP once again reinforced its commitment to the principles of non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means; also restating its commitment, under the Belfast Agreement, to provide political analysis to the leaderships of the UVF and RHC. Drawing on its manifesto and various other published policy documents it further outlined a commitment to the concept of conflict transformation ‘whereby we use all our skills and influence to encourage those who would normally use armed force to achieve political objectives, on to a path, which uses democratic principles to change political outcomes’. For its trouble the Party was fined £27,000 by the International Monitoring Commission, a sum which seriously set back an already impecunious operation.

The PUP’s response to the IMC Report is worth reproducing at length because it, in effect, demonstrates the inner mechanics of the day-to-day peace-building activities undertaken by Progressive Loyalism:

**“The work of the Party and individual members in Conflict Transformation**

“It is easy to complain about ongoing paramilitary activity and to both theorise about and prescribe methods of addressing such activity. It is not so easy to put such theories and prescriptions into practice. Conflict transformation is a *process* in which we seek to move from violent responses to conflict to non-violent responses. It is about working to transform the nature of the conflict from violent encounter to democratic exchange, and about transforming the nature of relationships between people in conflict. It is a process that looks for generational changes rather than quick fix solutions that last for a time and disappear.

**Restorative Justice**

“Progressive Unionist Party members were instrumental in setting up community restorative justice programmes in West Belfast, East Belfast, North Belfast and North Down. This was done in co-operation with local PSNI, statutory agencies, church and community representatives, the ex-prisoner community and paramilitary leaders. Each restorative justice programme being developed within loyalist communities is managed by multi-agency Management Committees, which include representatives from the PSNI. While paramilitary groups have bought-in to the restorative justice model they are not represented on any Management Committee and have no input to decision-making.

“In the past, communities sought paramilitaries to deliver instant justice, in the form of beatings, shootings and expulsions, to those accused of anti-social activities. The rationale of community restorative justice programmes is to provide a non-violent alternative, which works within the Rule of Law and complements the work of the PSNI and the Courts, for any community that seeks to end all so-called ‘punishment’ attacks. Independent evaluations carried out to date show that the restorative approach to addressing socially harmful activity is having a positive effect. We acknowledge that much more needs to be done in this area and members of both the Party Executive and Constituency Associations are making an important and positive contribution to the management and development of each programme.

“We fully endorse the opinions of political, church and civic leaders who oppose so-called ‘punishment’ beatings and expulsions. But genuine opposition must go beyond mere verbal condemnation. Genuine opposition demands practical action on the ground, and that is where society will find members of the Progressive Unionist Party.

## **Community Mediation**

“Progressive Unionist Party members have set up and maintain various community mediation projects, which seek to encourage local people at community level to develop non-violent responses to conflict. The Party Executive has organised training for its members and for constituency workers in the principles and practice of mediation and alternative dispute resolution. This has enhanced the capacity of party members to facilitate mediation in a variety of local disputes, including the issue of contentious parades, and to respond to requests from the PSNI and other statutory bodies such as the Parades Commission, to intervene in conflict situations that have the potential to escalate into violence.

## **Ex-Prisoner Interpretative Centre (EPIC)**

“The party has worked with EPIC to support the reintegration of former prisoners back into the mainstream of community and economic life. The reintegration of politically motivated ex-prisoners is essential to ensure a peaceful and stable society. Indeed, a key aspect of the peace process has been to encourage ex-prisoners to take on productive and active roles in their local communities. EPIC supports many ex-prisoners throughout their individual process of reintegration. They provide help with training, education, housing and welfare rights. All are essential services in the transformation process. The contribution that ex-prisoners have made in embedding non-violent approaches to conflict often goes unnoticed. Many ex-prisoners work in all areas of conflict transformation. One project due to be launched is the *You-Can* project, which, in conjunction with schools, aims to dissuade young people from joining paramilitary organisations through the testimony of former combatants.

## **Interface Projects**

“Sectarian unrest and violence have been well documented over the last number of years. Members have used their influence during ‘Fire-fighting’, bringing violence to an end. They have been available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to help prevent recurrences. The calm summer of last year did not happen by accident. PUP members, ex-combatants and ex-prisoners have worked tirelessly behind the scenes, putting together projects that aim to end the unrest and violence between the affected communities. It is extremely hard work trying to bring two sides of a community together particularly when there is no desire or willingness.

“Dialogue between loyalists and republicans, which continues throughout the year, is crucial to the task of addressing interface conflict. Members of the Party along with former UVF/RHC prisoners have been to the forefront in engaging with their republican counterparts in a wide variety of inter-community initiatives and dialogue.

## **Civic Society**

“The Progressive Unionist Party has continually broken ground that others now walk on. Seeing ‘dialogue’ as an absolute necessity in ending violence and encouraging peace and democracy members of the Party have worked with key members of civic society to help develop civic and community responses to paramilitary activity. As a result a number of initiatives involving the representatives of civic society working together with community activists and representatives of ex. prisoner groups have been established in the Greater Belfast Area, and beyond. While we acknowledge that many of these initiatives could not have developed if church, trade union, business community and other civic leaders had not become involved, we are not overstating the case when we suggest that party members were the catalyst that led to action.

## **Transforming Loyalist Communities**

“The Party Executive has developed an education programme based on the theme ‘Transforming Loyalist Communities’ which seeks to encourage young loyalists and members of paramilitary organisations to examine both the concept and the need for social transformation and the need to address those negative aspects of Loyalism that frustrate community and economic development and undermine the moral fibre of their communities.

The programme has been delivered by Party Members to young loyalists in a number of areas where the analysis and influence of the party is generally accepted.

### **Responding to Crime**

“The Progressive Unionist Party has been, and continues to be, active in pursuing initiatives that will assist in the development of safe and secure communities and is committed to rigorous opposition to organised crime, the illicit drugs trade, the vice trade, anti-social behaviour, racketeering and sectarian conflict. Party members across the Province have literally put their lives on the line in the fight against crime and vice. The party’s position is well known at both local and provincial level and the party position on crime, drugs and vice is being implemented at community level by members and supporters.

“Party members, including members of the Executive Committee, are involved at community level in programmes aimed at seeking to address the growing drugs culture within our communities. Members have contributed articles for publication, addressed seminars and conferences and lobbied both the PSNI and Government on issues related to crime, drugs and vice.

“We have also encouraged members of the public to report instances of such activity to the authorities or where they are fearful of doing so to make a complaint to either a Party representative or to the Loyalist Commission. Party members have reported instances of criminal activity to the leadership of the UVF/RHC and are aware that sanctions have been imposed by these groups on their own membership.

### **Anti-Racism**

“The Progressive Unionist Party has worked for many, many years with all minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland. The party lobbied for the introduction of Race Relations legislation and consulted many groups in the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement to ensure their voice was heard. The party has consistently condemned racist attacks from whatever source and its members have not only helped and supported victims in a practical sense, they have been instrumental in organising different events and projects aimed at promoting good relations. For the Progressive Unionist Party, conflict transformation does not just include those from each side of the sectarian divide; conflict transformation is a process that affects all the ‘interfaces’ that exist in society.<sup>34</sup>

The success of many of the initiatives in which PUP members are involved has been made possible through the support of the UVF-RHC leadership in certain areas. That Progressive Loyalism should be seen to throw off the worst excesses of militarism in favour of civic responsibility and a turn towards a radical working class interpretation of Unionism is justification of the progressive commitment to transform the conflict. In a sense they have demonstrated their tacit ability to advocate, in terms not previously understood by working class Protestants, the long cherished liberal Unionist value of active citizenship. Perhaps the one unfortunate consequence of this has been that neither their rationalism, nor the often-reluctant admiration lauded on loyalists from time to time by the larger body politic, has transformed the PUP, into an overnight ballot-box success. David Ervine’s personal standing does not seem to be sufficient to propel the party beyond runner-up positions in local or regional elections.

Retrospectively, though, Loyalism did enjoy a period of unrivalled political influence borne precisely out of an air of optimism created by the cease-fires of 1994 and by an electoral system ‘friendly’ to the fringe parties. Furthermore, the loyalist community has also had the good fortune of yielding a number of exceptionally capable ‘politicos’ like David Ervine,

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<sup>34</sup> *Progressive Unionist Party Rebuttal of the First Report of the International Monitoring Commission April 2004* (Belfast: PUP, 2004)

Billy Hutchinson, David Adams and Gary McMichael. Although the latter two have now been removed from the bigger political picture their presence did demonstrate that constructive influence can be exercised in a manner which both encourages a complimentary attitude among other siblings in the Unionist family and inspires trust from the Nationalist community.

Even without the release of the devastating IMC report many Loyalists recognised their clairvoyant ability to under-achieve in the political arena. With so much, seemingly, in their favour politically the ‘militarists’ within the UDA/UFF scored another own goal by, firstly, rejecting the analysis of the UDP and then ensuring that the Party was consigned to historical record, along with the political leadership of McMichael and Adams. Admittedly, the greatest failing of these latter two ‘politicos’ was the absence of a clear track record of militarism in their own personal histories, which often seems to be the defining prerequisite in any budding loyalist leader’s political Curriculum Vitae. With little or no irony in mind the progressives within the UDA replaced the UDP with an updated version of the New Ulster Political Research Group (NUPRG) that had originally been co-founded by Gary McMichael’s father, John, a one-time commander in chief of the UFF. The UPRG as it is now known – with the ‘New’ prefix dropped after all because it is far from a wholly novel concept – is currently staffed by many of the older guard from the founding days of the organisation when local defence associations amalgamated under the Province-wide UDA umbrella.

The loss of the UDP; a series of well publicised arrests of prominent Loyalists; the negative influence projected onto public discourse by feuding; and the exploits of several high profile ‘Mafia don’ figures, has served only to undermine much of the progress made in recent years across the broader UDA-UFF-UPRG constituency. During the last few years the UDA’s cease-fire has been stretched to the point where the authentic social and political aspirations of some its ‘politicos’ have been shown to be embarrassingly weak in light of *ad hoc* sectarian campaigns instigated in Belfast and beyond. The instigation of a twelve month military cessation last year only served as an incubator for the organisation and did little to dissipate its willingness to engage in violence.

Furthermore, the UVF has recently been thrown under the spotlight of intense media coverage too - unrivalled in any prior phase of the Ulster conflict, except of course for the Supergrass trials of the early eighties. The Raymond McCord Senior campaign; the resultant elevation of a prominent North Belfast UVF figure into the status of public enemy number one; the repeated naming of leadership figures based in the Shankill and further-a-field in local media reports (personnel who for decades coveted their anonymity); leadership replacements due to racist attacks and alleged internal feuding in Londonderry; and rumours of another feud with the UDA in Belfast all ensure that the PUP might well falter when local and national elections come online next year. The political bona fides of Ervine and Hutchinson can only carry the Party so far.

Whether the wider population believes that the ‘designer don’ image of Loyalism has finally retreated from the public arena - or from the inner hierarchy of the UDA for that matter - is perhaps asking for too much trust. Invariably it is also asking working class Protestants and Catholics to suspend their belief in street-level reality.

In a recent interview for the *North Belfast News* senior members of the UPRG were relatively downbeat on the peace dividends that have filtered through to the Protestant working class since the ceasefires and the Belfast Agreement. John Bunting claimed that ‘the slow strangulation of Protestant areas has increased over the past ten years’ and he pointed to the fact that the UDA was ‘getting bigger and stronger all the time’ as a sign that difficulties still exist in segregated working class districts across Belfast. What was encouraging, however, was his opinion that the UDA ‘was getting bigger for all the wrong reasons. We need to

educate our children and tell them that there is another way, a political way and not a paramilitary way'.<sup>35</sup>

That the UDA has increased its membership in those parts of Belfast where working class Protestants and Catholics live in close proximity is not a startling revelation to anyone residing at ground-level. A worrying knock-on effect though has been the rise in sectarian violence. These communities continually face one another across a peace-line which exists on tenterhooks; the media seem uninterested in covering a well-known story which has superseded its newsworthiness. The Protestant sense of defeatism<sup>36</sup> and alienation has certainly fed the monster of sectarianism, but on plentiful occasions Republicans have only too willingly engaged in nightly street combat with their Loyalist neighbours.

### **British State Strategies and the Progressive Loyalist Dilemma**

The British State's seemingly asymmetrical attitude towards Loyalism and Republicanism continues to provoke disdain from progressive quarters. The perception among Ulster Loyalists being that while the British state continues to facilitate Republicanism in its politicisation, Loyalist bids to transform their paramilitary 'partners' have been continually undermined by those securocrat elements eager to cut adrift one of the few Parties to actually champion the peace process. In a conflict transformation process it is the priority of all participants to do their utmost to accelerate the democratisation and demobilisation of those who had previously sought to effect political change through violent deeds. This also includes those governmental administrations that have stepped into to act as guarantors.

Attempts by British Government securocrats to play a perverse game of 'good cop', 'bad cop' has had a debilitating effect on progressive loyalist endeavours to facilitate a new political and socio-economic dispensation for the Protestant Working Class. Mark Langhammer<sup>37</sup> is right to point out that the NIO have been pouring money into community/voluntary sector programmes, but he has not fully appreciated their rationale for doing so. Loyalist non-combatant politics is benefiting from this 'good cop' approach, but their militarist partners are being marginalised by securocrat attempts to play 'bad cop' in the prosecution of their intelligence war against Ulster's paramilitaries. *Sinn Fein*/PIRA knows only too well the consequences of this, and has lost many hardened veterans in the confusing treacherous atmosphere precipitated by British security policies of divide and conquer.

The critique tabled by Langhammer is an audacious piece of anti-Loyalist rhetoric that one might expect to emanate from a mainstream Unionist source. He may be emboldened by his 'on the ground' knowledge, afterall he has been a community-level practitioner for many years with a proven track record for securing amenities for the local communities he represents (mainly Rathcoole and Bawnmore) at local Government level, but his calls for a military solution are highly unrealistic and provocative; that is precisely what led to the 'hurting stalemate' back in the 1990s. In any case British troops flooding working class areas (like we witnessed during the loyalist feuds) is not a viable long-term option at a time when we are witnessing the downscaling of troop levels in the Province. The IMC has its spotlight pointed not only on paramilitaries but also on the security forces.

So, is this all bad news for Loyalists? Not quite. NIO watchers will notice that a new approach has been taken in recent months, involving renewed focus being shifted towards the community development aspects of the Belfast Agreement - especially during a time when crucial political aspects of the peace process have failed to deliver. The achievements of the

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<sup>35</sup> *North Belfast News*, 18 September 2004

<sup>36</sup> See the rather erudite article by Andrew Finlay 'Defeatism and Northern Protestant Identity' in the *Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 1, No. 2, December 2001, pp. 3-20

<sup>37</sup> 'Cutting with the Grain: How to Make Change in the Protestant Community'

voluntary and community sector in the actual delivery of tangible peace and reconciliation have, to date, been hugely underplayed by the body politic. For its part, the media, which threw its support almost unquestionably behind the Agreement, has remained generally uninterested in the considerable, if somewhat more mundane, results generated by this sector.

### **Community Transformation or Criminality? The Choice Confronting Ulster Loyalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

A very active forum in which loyalism acts out a more openly constructive, engaging and progressive form of grass-roots politics is within the community sector. However this involvement continues to remain one step removed from what might be termed 'real politics'. One of the pre-cursors to many of the changes in loyalism was the Non-Violent Social Change Initiative (NVSCI) which was based in loyalist urban and rural areas in the Northwest of the Province – a partnership between a number of community-based organisations as well as paramilitarists and the PUP. Essential to the success of this programme - which aimed to facilitate the journey from political violence to politics - was that participants were genuinely challenged by the critical dialogue model employed by the Initiative's co-ordinators.

It is also in this sphere where ex-prisoner groups – such as REACT and EPIC - have embraced the concepts of active citizenship, peace-building and reconciliation, thus enabling more pronounced community-based aspects of loyalism to overcome hostilities within and between communities. The willingness of key influencers within the UVF-RHC-PUP constituency to accept analysis and support from faith-based groups such as LINC and from individual clergy and civic leaders shows a commitment to working with civic society to help facilitate change. This is where loyalism is dynamic, reflective and open to further development.

The poor visibility which cloaks the community sector under the national media radar; which, if it detects the sector at all, is primarily interested in a few juicy stories in relation to monies unaccounted for or project failures, has meant that much of the progress to date has gone unnoticed. All this nevertheless leaves grass-roots loyalists free to develop new modes of thought and engagement away from glaring publicity, but at the expense of appearing increasingly distant from the 'militarist' dominated mainstream. The flip side of this is that - as new political credit accrues - the latest pedigree of skilled community workers from within the loyalist community confidently venture forth resolute in their convictions to give fair representation to *their* people. Hopefully these endeavours will begin to feed through to big 'P' politics before it is deemed too late.

#### ***Criminality?***

Professor Adrian Guelke is one of the very few scholars to foresee the possible futures for Ulster Loyalism. His stark warning that paramilitaries risked splitting into diametrically opposed camps (constitutionalists versus mafias) has more resonance today as we sit at Loyalism's fork in the road.

“At best, they [paramilitaries] might develop into exclusively constitutional political parties, although it seems unlikely that such a development would precede a comprehensive political settlement. Another possibility is their evolution into mafias. And, of course, it is possible that there will be a return to war between the paramilitaries”.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Guelke, Adrian 'Political Violence and the Paramilitaries' in Mitchell, Paul and Rick Wilford (Eds.) *Politics in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1999), p. 50

The nefarious activities of certain members of loyalist paramilitaries have certainly been a hindrance in selling the Agreement, for both the PUP and UDP. As one ex-prisoner noted

“Middle unionism is very unforgiving of people who have operated beyond the law, middle unionism is very hypocritical, e.g. when I was involved I found their condemnation easy to live with because there was none but now you are suddenly a bogey man, you are exposed as an ex-prisoner. For the nationalist / republican community, whilst not condoning violence, they certainly are willing to draw a line under it and move on, they gave SF the space and opportunity to move into politics – I can’t see this ever happening in unionism.

“The criminality within Loyalism is an undeniably big problem – facilitates an approach by government to use a broad brush analysis which says all Loyalism is criminal – that perception has to be challenged. Its not a matter of denying criminality, as someone from a paramilitary background I have difficulty with the criminal elements within Loyalism so I am sure for the ordinary man in the street it is just unacceptable. Clearly it was naïve of me but I really thought that 10 years after the first ceasefire that (loyalist and republican) paramilitaries would not be here, at least not to the current extent today. This may be on account that most people simply hoped the paramilitaries would go away sooner rather than later – this does not reflect the realities of the situation. Government and others have not facilitated the transition away from political violence e.g. most of those involved in political violence over the last thirty years now have a criminal record – they are currently blocked from a whole range of jobs – if these guys are to make money they will naturally turn to the black economy, drugs, cigarettes whatever”.<sup>39</sup>

“Those who involve themselves criminal activity, drug dealing, racketeering etc. – feed the myth that all loyalists are good at is looking after themselves – there are a lot of Loyalists involved in self gain and self promotion – they would be involved in criminality regardless of any peace process – there are also a lot of progressive loyalists trying to move the peace process forward – unfortunately they have been sidelined – the British government bears a lot of responsibility for this because they were too busy looking after SF – Loyalism backed in to a corner will come out fighting. A meaningful conflict transformation process has to be put in place to convince some elements to move on, to de-mobilise. There is still hope for a transformation policy, probably only if outside agencies fund such an initiative – the Government is very unlikely to introduce it now. A top down approach is a recipe for disaster. It is just so obvious that if there is no incentive to transform that ex-prisoners and ex-combatants will turn to the black economy. It is clear we need a twin track approach –transform/assist the progressive elements, police/criminal justice system for the criminal elements”.

**Plum Smith:** “The future of Loyalism is probably greater criminality – there are leaders who only reinforce and give credence to this analysis. The same is true in republican areas – just look at Ardoyne.

“The UVF is heading slowly to the point where you have a mixture of criminality and Loyalism which can’t operate as one unit as it did during combat – for those willing to change in the UVF this is a difficult climate.

“No different for republicanism, same problems with drugs – fuel rackets, cigarettes just the same – plus they have the growth of the dissidents now. SF now facing the same issues as PUP – greater problems for SF in that to hold on to the trappings of government they will have to disengage with the military wing, but if they do that they will lose control of their areas to the dissidents – this is already happening in areas in the Falls, Ardoyne and Bawnmore – SF is better at hiding and managing the problems – helps that their brigadiers are covered in the Sunday papers every week”.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Tom Roberts, 23 August 2004

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Plum Smith, 25 August 2004

**Colin Robinson:** “We must not lose sight of the fact that there is still a hell of a lot of work to be done in bringing the paramilitaries along, to get them ‘out of the jungle’ – who else will work with them? – I think it is vital for the PUP’s credibility with its partners that it has some electoral strength, that we are not just a ginger group. There are many pressing issues at the moment e.g. the increasing criminality, the on-going recruitment... We cannot allow working class areas to be fleeced by criminal elements within Loyalism”.<sup>41</sup>

### *Defeatism?*

**Tom Roberts:** “The current defeatism within unionism has made the PUP pro-Agreement position increasingly difficult – I don’t think there now is such a thing as a pro-Agreement Party, some were and are simply pro aspects of the Agreement which suited/suits them – in today’s political environment the Agreement couldn’t be negotiated. Had people and parties worked together after the signing of the Agreement things might have been better today. Unfortunately the two sides of unionism preferred to point the finger of blame at each other, republicans and nationalists tend to get on with the work, selling the Agreement to their own constituencies, Trimble went immediately on the defensive on signing the Agreement (focussing on the UUP right wing critics) rather than promoting it – the DUP were skilled in pointing out the deficiencies, using emotive aspects like the political prisoners and the victims.

“As a Unionist I still can’t see much wrong with the document – Unionism has gained change in constitutional status, dropping Articles 2 and 3. Seems the PUP in a minority position of being willing to take risks for a peaceful settlement but never had the political/electoral clout to influence the pro-Agreement discourse – when this lack of influence became apparent then the PUP was weakened, its avowedly pro working class policies became lost in the political fog, the Party too embroiled in trying to work the Agreement, with only two representatives there was simply too much work to be done in the Assembly – others were therefore left to organise the Party on the ground. The Party needs to get a focus again on the issues, a campaigning strategy. The Party has fallen years behind in its development”.<sup>42</sup>

### *Politicos and Militarists: Time to Break the Link?*

**Dawn Purvis:** “The time is coming soon for the Party to break with its ‘partners’ – the partner organisations have to change – these challenges are being made now – partners are now being challenged about their willingness to transform. There are dilemmas around an aging leadership and the influx of ceasefire soldiers. Ten years after the ceasefire we should have already transformed the partner organisations but a major handicap has been the lack of any serious conflict transformation strategy, nor an anti-sectarianism strategy”.<sup>43</sup>

**Plum Smith:** “Whilst the party has been involved in the management of the peace process it was always the plan that at some stage we would break the link would grow as a political party – events on the ground have militated against this course of action e.g. the 2000 feud – we were thrust into that whether we liked it or not – Drumcree for a couple of years meant we had to keep the links with the paramilitaries – we wanted at one time to move to being exclusively political, recognising our past and offering advice and insight to the UVF/RHC – events still prevent it – we need to influence events on the ground and you can’t do that without links to the paramilitaries.

“The paramilitaries do want to come out of the jungle. It’s the same in all areas of the world – take in Nicaragua with the Sandinistas and the Contras – then the Banditos who were the ones who couldn’t transform so formed a guerrilla army without any cause; in Colombia with the FARC – no country has been successful in conflict transformation. Here the legislation works against you because you can’t get a job, can’t emigrate to USA or Australia – barriers to developing your life so you turn to black market and crime to supplement an income – in

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Colin Robinson, 20 August 2004

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Tom Roberts, 23 August 2004

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Dawn Purvis, 23 August 2004

Loyalism you can see how it has broken down into gangs – in many ways we are still in conflict”.<sup>44</sup>

**Billy Mitchell:** “The PUP has made progress but there is an awful lot of progress still to be made – chief task is to assist the UVF leadership to help bring their men out of the jungle – the leadership wants this help and support – I believe that their hearts are in the right place but I think they need to do more about the bad elements in the organisation – the old fear was that if they are expelled they will form a dissident group. Perhaps the time has come to take that risk. I am convinced that the senior and middle management of the UVF-RHC is committed heart and soul to conflict transformation and our party must remain committed to supporting them. The PUP has a moral obligation to maintain the link with the UVF-RHC until such times as the conflict transformation process is completed. There can be no question of us deserting our former comrades just to enhance our political image. Conflict transformation must take priority over success at the polls.”<sup>45</sup>

**Robin Stewart:** “Money is the big issue for the PUP not the connection to UVF-RHC – *Sinn Fein* is a good example. Yes the connection might turn some people off but no matter what the UVF-RHC do the PUP will come out and give an honest answer – if someone is shot what do you say – its wrong, simple as that. The PUP can’t just turn round to the UVF and say you can’t do that. Problem is that for many people the UVF and PUP is one and the same, everyone in the PUP knows its not one and the same, it did come from the UVF-RHC originally and I am quite proud of that – you don’t deny where you came from, but we have moved on, we stand alone. If we did come out and said we were the same thing we could get more votes – the vote does not transfer from one to the other”.

**Billy Hutchinson:** “I would agree that electorally speaking the UVF is the kiss of death to the PUP but, for me on the one hand the UVF is unrepresentable cos [sic.] they are not a homogenous group in their political thought the way it would appear with *Sinn Fein*/PIRA with their electoral strength. At the same time the reason I got involved in this in the first place was to try and end this war and if we don’t have that remit to try to end this working with UVF/RHC then we might as well go off and join some other political party”.<sup>46</sup>

**David Ervine:** “One UVF commander, when I took up politics publicly, said to me – you are making a mistake, the UVF are unrepresentable, they are an amalgam, without a single philosophy, a broad church. He had a point but there had to be a way of involving Loyalism in the process. No-one ever gives us the credit – we forced our way into the peace process after the ceasefire. We wanted to resolve this conflict, the price we paid has been a heavy one in potential electoral fortune. The pressures I have come under in terms of breaking the link with the UVF has been opposed. I think they should be left to abandon us, in other words we have to give them every conceivable opportunity. I would be uncomfortable with the condition Loyalism is in, but relatively comfortable with the intentions of the leadership of the UVF and Red Hand towards the new situation. I think Loyalism is actually much more capable of being positive than it is given credit for. Loyalism has to change, and they know it. Senior and middle management are up for it so I could see a broader appreciation of a (being a) movement, a sense of movement, but that would be through education, conflict resolution processes. There is some logic in the position that if you were prepared to die for your country you should be prepared to work for it.

“There are three sets of UVF personnel: - (1) the guy that says ‘its over, I’m away home’ (2) the guy prepared to work for his country e.g. in community development or politics, there are not many of these (3) then the ones who worry me, in other words ‘patriotism the last refuge of the scoundrel’. The UVF were held back terribly with three feuds.

“We need to give individuals different ways to change and prosper, to re-align. The movement in terms of the UVF and Red Hand is unlikely to change because they would not

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Plum Smith, 25 August 2004

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Billy Mitchell, 17 August 2004

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Robin Stewart, 14 September 2004

trust the state to protect them. There is evidence to suggest the state could not protect them. So they will want fellowship. Contained within that movement element is the potential that some of them will move towards the PUP or some of them will become more understanding of the PUP. An education programme to relate the need for change is needed. There is also a serious lack of capacity within Loyalism to speak out, people are afraid. There is a need to empower people, to ensure they are comfortable with the choices they have to make. But paramilitaries can be role models. We need role models to change society. At least this party is trying. Not everything we do is bad".<sup>47</sup>

### *The Future*

**Dawn Purvis:** "The PUP needs to re-focus on community activism, i.e. the water charges offer a good opportunity to take the lead on the opposition campaign. The Party needs to overcome the notion within the Protestant working class that the class are 'no good' at politics – politics is a job for middle unionism, PUP good at Council level only".<sup>48</sup>

The Belfast Agreement is viewed by a majority of PUP members as failing to deliver for the Protestant working class. PUP arguments in favour of the Agreement have, however, often lacked a concise definition. Some suggest that the PUP's position has been terribly convoluted in recent years and has lacked precision. In complete contrast the DUP's oppositional position has been much easier to get across.

In terms of the overall picture for Loyalism Dawn Purvis remains convinced that the wider movement cannot be re-united; she is convinced that Loyalism is under attack from the State in a manner similar to the Black Panthers in USA, which were successfully infiltrated by the CIA and their reputation tarnished by drugs scandals. She feels that the British government had not reckoned with dealing with Loyalism considering it a matter for the RUC/PSNI – that the process was a case of the government dealing with mainstream unionism, not the Loyalism of the PUP/UDP, i.e. the thesis here is that during the negotiations there was a desire to destroy Loyalism because there were too many unionist voices. The future is one underpinned by democratic socialism focussing on the working class.

Meanwhile the UVF's position remains clear and unambiguous: the onus is on those in the wider Unionist family to cement the peace process. 'There needs to be clear leadership from Unionism [beyond the PUP] which can breed confidence - the DUP has been very effective in scaring people for years – now that they are in government they will not be able to continue scaring people'.<sup>49</sup>

**Plum Smith:** "I do not think we will ever go back to political violence in Northern Ireland but I can see a degeneration into criminal gangland. For the Government the choice is clear: identify the Progressive Loyalists and Republicans who are part of the peace process and part of the future – work with these people. The other elements should be dealt with by PSNI. It seems to be a deliberate tactic by the PSNI not to deal with those elements – same was true during the 2000 feud".<sup>50</sup>

Smith went public at that time to highlight the issues around the drug houses but again no action was taken. There has always been support for the theory that the police allowed the drugs to come in to de-stabilise Loyalism, allowed the rogue elements to grow within Loyalist paramilitaries. Smith continued

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with David Ervine, 21 September 2004

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Dawn Purvis, 23 August 2004

<sup>49</sup> Interview with a Senior UVF Brigade Staff Officer, 9 September 2004

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Plum Smith, 25 August 2004

**Plum Smith:** “When you take out the legacy of the political conflict in Northern Ireland what you get is a picture on Northern Ireland which is very similar to other parts of the UK in terms of urban degeneration, could be Birmingham, Glasgow or London with the gangland elements operating freely.

“Yes the PUP has an electoral future in that we will always get one or two elected in our core areas, but I feel a whole lot worked against us. Post 1994 you had the feel good factor but that is long gone, now PUP elected representatives are there almost on the strength of their personalities. In the immediate future we are not going anywhere fast because we do not have the resources but that could change. Now I am involved more with the community than I am with the politics there are effectively two processes now – the political process/high politics at Stormont and the peace process which is the day-to-day workings in the community. That in my view is where the PUP should concentrate its energies; leave the high politics alone for a while. What happens in our communities is more important – we have always done this work anyway.

“Around 1994 we were meeting Prime Ministers and Presidents, we were part of a process, but because we couldn’t convert this into electoral strength Loyalism has in part degenerated. The causes of the conflict, as SF would say, have not been addressed. Now you have ceasefire soldiers who would never have got involved before 1994. This is partly a result of competition between the paramilitaries - strength and turf. To me Loyalism has broken down into gangs, depending who is in charge of an area defines the quality of life for the people in that area. There is no war, no focus – we are trying to transform them but you are up against it – drugs is a key issue, there is big money in that. Sectarianism is growing now in our community and becoming more public.

“Well there are certainly people trying to give it [Loyalism] some future – it could have reached its bottom point and could be ready to take strides forward if it gets help and assistance from Government; it’s in the interests of Government and society to help us move the situation forward. Without resources we have no chance.<sup>51</sup> [Note: Epic’s funding ends in May 2005]”.

**Colin Robinson:** “In terms of the electoral impact; because we tend to put Country before Party, as patriots, we tend to be in the ascendancy when risks needed to be taken to move events on, we will always to the chance to move things on which leaves us feeling used at various times. We at this stage are in danger of becoming the Workers Party version two; at least the Party administration has been sorted out. The problem we have is that the Loyalist working class constituency are sometimes very reactionary, we have to try and bring those people along, sometimes you have to articulate their needs which trying to explained that at times they are being conned, e.g. by the education system. There is often a feeling that working class Unionists/Loyalists will always vote for the Eleven plus, despite the fact that working class kids have no chance in that system. If the Party operates in an avowedly Left wing analysis there is a danger of becoming remote from the natural working class constituency of the Party, of losing all influence. We have got to be shrewd, hang on to our credentials, moving the constituency on slowly, we can still take risks. Unfortunately we still have to chase votes; that’s the difficult bit. I can see the attraction of becoming a ginger group - concentrating on issues rather than positions which are electorally attractive.

“It is vital to politicise people sufficiently to ensure they are prepared to come out and vote – people who might be sympathetic to the outlook of the PUP need to be convinced to vote for the Party – this includes ensuring that working class Protestants register for the vote – that is a major issue at the moment particularly for young people. There is evidence to suggest that working class Unionists/Loyalists are more interested in aspiring to middle Unionism/middle class than they are in voting on issues that affect the working classes”.<sup>52</sup>

**Billy Mitchell:** “The only way forward for the PUP is class politics, not necessarily doctrinaire socialism. It has to focus on making a difference in terms of class politics;

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Plum Smith, 25 August 2004

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Colin Robinson, 20 August 2004

probably within a regionalised Great Britain, within which there will be a chance for the Left to consolidate. The issues of nationality won't come into it; this has to happen within the PUP. This debate has to happen even if it means a shrinking of the PUP in terms of numbers. The PUP has made a lot of progress, but we haven't got our heads around the international issues. Even some of the local campaigns, e.g. water charges, racism, PFI – [we are against these things] but we never fight/campaign on them. We need to change from issues we support to issues we are prepared to fight and campaign on. It's often a question of resources: if you don't have them it's difficult to campaign.

“Would we be better as a working class socialist lobby group, rather than party worrying about elections? This debate is necessary and needs to happen; is it a question of being afraid of alienating our support groups/potential voters? If they don't like us do we really need their votes; we could end up like the Workers Party, a couple of hundred votes here and there – maybe not a bad idea although they have been in the wilderness for so long its probably a bad idea, same as the SWP, or the Socialist Party? Good Parties [with] influence within the Trade Union movement, but with little connection to communities.

“But before we can even think of developing a programme of class politics we must complete the conflict transformation process. Genuine class based politics will only succeed when there is an absence of sectarian conflict between the disempowered and the marginalised poor from both traditional communities.<sup>53</sup>

**Robin Stewart:** “Electorally we have taken hammerings; there may be more: the loss of Hutchy was a big blow – particularly someone who had worked as hard as he did makes you wonder just what you have to do to get people to vote for you. We will suffer worse, but as long as we remain optimistic; I mean my head has been down at times – in the end there is no alternative, take the knocks and come back fighting. We just need to find the spark again. I suppose its cos [sic.] I'm a bit of a Socialist; my biggest problem is that the Party has become attractive to the middle class, not the working class. In areas round here we have to constantly raise our profile – these are our natural supporters round here, this is the natural base for a working class party. I think a lot of us from the early days; we feel there is not the same ownership. Truthfully a lot of us did not have a lot of education, some were self-educated and it was great; it was fun; people listened to you. Then we were getting people in the Party who were university-educated and it wasn't gelling as it should have. They were an asset but we wanted a plainer language and it was becoming more complicated. My view is that if I can understand it then the person on the street can understand it. You have to be very conscious of who you are aiming at. The water rates is the biggest thing facing us [at the moment]”.<sup>54</sup>

**Tom Roberts:** “In the run up to the Agreement Loyalism played its part in creating the space for negotiations. The ceasefire was/is by no means perfect but the situation in Northern Ireland is definitely better now than a decade ago. Therefore, what we need to do is look at the aspects that are good and try to work on them. The problem is that now the DUP is the main Unionist player and they don't want an inclusive approach. History teaches us that when Unionism and Loyalism are together progress can be made; [when they are] separated progress is more difficult”.<sup>55</sup>

**Billy Hutchinson:** “I think the PUP can be a socialist party but first we have to get rid of the conflict; then there might be an opportunity not just for the PUP but for others for a realignment, i.e. getting away from the Nationalist/Republican-Unionist/Loyalist groupings. There could then be opportunities for new groupings which will include all elements but at the minute there are people out there with weapons and we need to bring them to a particular point in all of this. It's an on-going job which will take years - maybe a generation - to change”.

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Billy Mitchell, 17 August 2004

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Robin Stewart, 14 September 2004

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Tom Roberts, 23 August 2004

“My worry is that the underclass is growing bigger and bigger in Loyalist areas and (The Prime Minister) is just going to let it grow, he is not going to try to do anything about it. My view would be that sooner or later someone will have to take notice. Whether Blair wants to is another matter. I think things will get worse before they get better, I don’t know how we will get Blair’s ear or make him understand. He has the DUP and SF agreeing to make a deal at the minute which is not conflict resolution, its making deals.

“One of the difficulties for me is that I believe we have to stick to our principles and if people won’t elect us because of our principles then so be it; we shouldn’t change things to get elected. The important thing is that we get elected because people want us. We should not be thinking about what would make us more electable. Here we are, warts and all. We continue to play a positive role whether we are elected or not. The most important thing is that something positive happens for the community. If you don’t have an electoral mandate then it reduces your influence to make things happen. That’s the Catch 22. I can understand that individuals change their style or presentation but in terms of the party we stick to our principles, that is working class politics, moving paramilitaries to another level, getting rid of the weapons. That’s our role. We should stick to that”.<sup>56</sup>

**David Ervine:** “The politics of the PUP has been naïve in the extreme, not in terms of its policies but in terms of the practicalities e.g. the way in which politicians here attract electoral popularity is to be tough on the other side, to be loud – this plays out with *Sinn Fein* and DUP. PUP had a difficulty with that, if we had done that to steal others clothes then potentially we could have risked de-stabilising the UVF and Red Hand. Coming from the backgrounds that some of us have we are very wary of how our words can be taken very literally. The PUP is a Party that people like rather than love, people take the safe option of keeping away from it. People say ‘we like what you say’ but clearly there is a price to pay for the relationship with the UVF and Red Hand, unlike the nationalist community who seem to be more sophisticated in their electoral judgements.

The PUP remains avowedly socialist; there are no other socialist parties in Northern Ireland”.<sup>57</sup>

It is clear to those interviewed that Loyalism needs help to transform. It is not enough just to blame paramilitaries for all of society’s ills. However, that is not to deny that at times they are involved in illegal activities; but it is time to encourage Progressive Loyalist elements to challenge the negative regressive elements; to challenge them directly to work for their community, not to live off the ‘fat of the land’.

The challenge of transforming and unifying the Loyalist working class to a stage where this translates into electoral strength is probably impossible. This relates to the fact that middle Unionism is so unforgiving of past Loyalist paramilitary activities; unlike their Nationalist/Republican counterparts who seem to take into their bosom with little or no difficulty. It is clear that the activities of a few individuals within Loyalism has tainted the public’s perception of Loyalists; but Loyalism still has a lot more to offer than ‘a muscle-bound bloke in a sleeveless gym top’ or ‘a dog in a t-shirt’. There are undoubtedly individuals in it for the long haul who wish to do what is best for working class communities. The problem is that Loyalist working class communities tend to look to middle Unionism for political representation. The PUP and UPRG sorts out local issues; ‘respectable’ Unionists sort out high politics; such is the condition of the Protestant political psyche.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Billy Hutchinson, 20 September 2004

<sup>57</sup> Interview with David Ervine, 21 September 2004

<sup>58</sup> A similar point has been made by Loyalists from the UDA-UFF-UPRG constituency. See, for instance, the interview with Sammy Duddy and John Bunting in the *North Belfast News*, 18 September 2004.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Anniversaries are important milestones. The fact that we celebrate or commemorate them magnifies their importance. Indeed some are more difficult to deal with than others: none more so than the tenth anniversary of the Loyalist and Republican paramilitary ceasefires. We have already been subjected to a rather subdued celebration of the PIRA declaration of 31<sup>st</sup> August (in so far as it can be judged to be ten years old) and we now sit back awaiting, in eager anticipation, for Loyalism to once again reciprocate. However, a decade on we face the prospect of a Loyalism lacking not only political optimism, but also cohesion and direction.

Within the community sector there is sufficient space and perhaps more opportunity to challenge some of the regressive and immature posturings advanced by loyalist detractors; that is to say those who will stop at nothing to ameliorate the refrigeration of 'the Cold House' for Unionists. The daily work routine of Loyalist activists and their community sector partners might be better documented in terms conducive to peace and reconciliation. Here it is possible to witness the many stages in the journey from the involvement and support of political violence to democratisation through politics. For 'militarists' to re-construct themselves as 'politicos' and for 'politicos' to emerge with the confidence to challenge both the nature and form of the political status-quo within their communities, and beyond, is perhaps an optimistic staging post in the imagined future destination of Loyalism. It is here, in the transformative metamorphosis from 'militarist' to 'politico', that the future of Loyalism is being fermented.

For the media these journeys and transformations are considered largely immaterial, and this tends to lead to overzealous misconceptions and misrepresentations. That the most revealing news stories for public consumption are considered to be the exhibition of the pejorative imagery of paramilitary godfathers presiding aloft criminal fiefdoms - while subjecting their fellow citizens to fear and intimidation - is unfortunate. In the short-term it serves no profitable purpose except as a cheap gimmick to boost television ratings and print media circulation; but, in the long-term, it dilutes the potency and vibrancy of Loyalism as a legitimate political creed.

In many ways the interviews undertaken for this pamphlet have been reassuring in the sense that there is clearly an identifiable common thread of analysis running through them. The PUP's analysis of the past ten years is both well considered and consistent. Only two topics solicited a wide range of views. The first concerned the future political and electoral direction of the Party and the second its relationship (or at least the nature of its relationship) with the Ulster Volunteer Force and Red Hand Commando. Effectively the second determines the first.

How and when (or whether) the relationship between the Party and its paramilitary partners can be successfully severed, by either side, is an issue which is now at the forefront of many Party activists' minds. If the views expressed by our interviewees can be generalised to the wider Party (which we cannot be sure they can with any definitiveness) a much more thoroughgoing 'in-house' survey would seem an appropriate step in the right direction. However it would appear that the time is ripe for a re-definition of the relationship as a prelude to a more complete de-coupling in the longer term. The Party's electoral fortunes shall then be underpinned principally by the dynamism of its political analysis rather than by its debilitating relationship with paramilitarism.

The success (or otherwise) of this de-coupling will no doubt inform the political and electoral fortunes of the Party in the next phase, whatever shape or form this may take. Potentially the Party could clarify and accentuate the development of its socialist or community-based

politics; certainly there is scope for that to happen. Alternatively there is also support within the Party to shy away from electoral politics in favour of an approach which is more issue-based, to become a ginger group. That might be a worse case scenario but it is an option to be forwarded and debated upon at all levels. That some Party activists hold differing views from each other on certain fundamental issues is a healthy sign for any political organisation in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Discussion over future political strategy and tactics for the Party is clearly what needs to be addressed before any disembarkation towards a future destination for the Protestant working class constituency represented by the PUP can be made.

Should these two aspects be resolved the PUP's political survival in the next ten years will be assured.

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### **Afterword**

Since the 1970s Loyalism has sought to transform itself from a highly localised and narrowly conceived militaristic phenomenon into a coherent regional collective with its own distinct social and political philosophy. It is recognised by the authors that Loyalism has become politically sophisticated in recent years, both in terms of constructing a realistic ideology and in the apprehending of positive dispensations for the good of the Protestant working class community.

The authors are currently engaged in establishing a three-way partnership between academic researchers, community/voluntary sector workers and political activists. This project seeks to promote greater academic and public understanding of Ulster Loyalist politics and ideology as it struggles for its political existence in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We acknowledge that the ceasefires created the space for working class Protestants to engage with the political process and opened up greater possibilities for dialogue with traditional enemies.

At a conference entitled: *Lineage and Legitimacy: Redefining Ulster Loyalist Politics and Ideology* held at The Queens' University of Belfast in May 2004 we heard papers from representatives from each of these constituencies. A profitable exchange was had amongst participants and we wish to extend our thanks to them. Our intention is to organise another conference in the autumn of 2004 to account for the past ten years from a Loyalist perspective and we invite potential participants to contact us at [aaron.edwards@qub.ac.uk](mailto:aaron.edwards@qub.ac.uk) or [stephenbloomer2004@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:stephenbloomer2004@yahoo.co.uk)