

Angela Clarke
VCU
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To: Frank Duffy
Liam Quinn
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Dave Wall

TRANSFORMING LOYALIST COMMUNITIES PROJECT

1. John Spellar was approached some months ago, by a number of representatives of key loyalist groupings about a project they wanted to take forward that would seek to look at the issue of transforming loyalist communities. They presented the attached paper to the Minister as background.
2. Specifically the groups were looking for assistance in undertaking a piece of research that would evaluate the work that is already happening in this area, attempt to analyse its impact and possibly identify what could usefully be continued and replicated. Billy Gamble agreed to take the lead on this and, together with Mary lemon(NIO) and myself has been meeting with Billy Mitchell (LINC), Tom Winstone (NI Alternatives), Colin Robinson (The Bridge), Plum Smyth and Tom Roberts (both EPIC) to discuss what exactly the aims and objectives of such a project might be and to look at how, if at all, government could help.
3. What has now emerged is a partnership project that will seek to evaluate the work that has been undertaken by these various organisations and others in this field and attempt to analyse its impact in terms of its ability to tackle conflict transformation in loyalist communities. OFM/DFM have made available resources in the form of various research personnel to help conduct the evaluation. The community organisations have enlisted the help of a researcher from Queens University who has some experience in this area, and CFNI have offered the help of

Stephen Bloomer who will make available the various evaluations and analyses that have been conducted by them, and by other funders.

4. The researchers are now, as a first step, trying to focus on gathering and analysing existing evaluations and literature with a view to identifying the main issues and gaps. Once this is complete they will be better able to look at the design of the project. They are trying to acquire material such as evaluations carried out by funders, previous research exercises and so on. Billy, Mary and myself have agreed to liaise with our own departments with a view to accessing any such literature that might be available in this area within government.

5. Could I ask you to consider whether or not you have any such information that you could share with the research team. If so, it would be helpful if you could forward it, as soon as possible, to Vincent Gribbin at the following address:

Equality Directorate Research Branch
OFMDFM
Room A5.4
Castle Buildings
Stormont
BT4 3SG

Tel: 028 90 523222
Email: vincent.gribbin@ofmdfmni.gov.uk

6. Many thanks for giving this your consideration. I am, of course, happy to discuss.

Angela Clarke

Transforming Loyalist Communities

"Yet I who have gone away
To safe and easy exile
Cannot quite write them off
As simple ignorant thugs

I too am involved in their crimes."

S. Heaney

A: Introduction

Prior to the early sixties Protestants expressed their loyalty to the state through joining the Crown Forces, whether it was the police, army, "B" or "C" Specials. Previous to that one has to go back to 1912 to the formation of the UVF to find Protestants going outside the law to defend their beliefs.

Republicans, however, have a long tradition of guerrilla warfare and a long tradition of prisons and hunger strikes. It was not until the mid-sixties that Protestants found themselves in prison for carrying out acts of unlawful politically motivated violence.

The formation of paramilitaries in the early seventies and the rise of violence in both communities led to downward spiral of society and its infrastructure, particularly in working class areas. The thirty years of violence resulted in paramilitarism being part of the norm rather than the exception. It filtered into every thread of our society. Agencies often negotiated with paramilitary leaders. Police often referred the public to the paramilitaries to deal with crime and neighbourhood disputes. Schools, Housing Executive, Churches, and Businesses were all affected by Paramilitarism.

The ceasefires and emergence of spokespersons within Loyalist working class communities during the negotiations of the Good Friday Agreement seemed a breath of fresh air for peace and prosperity in our communities. They appeared to be leading paramilitaries in a peaceful direction and, at that time, were achieving a fair measure of success.

The first Assembly Elections gave rise to hope within Loyalist working class communities that they could confidently look forward to a peaceful future. However, loyalists were unable to transform military collateral into political success. The inability of the UDP to gain seats in the assembly heralded their eventual demise. The

token two seats of the PUP gradually became unimportant as they were frozen out of the negotiation process.

In the paramilitary arena things were taking a different twist. Paramilitaries extended their areas of domination throughout Northern Ireland. It is estimated that more people have joined paramilitaries since the ceasefires than there was prior to ceasefires. Many of those who were recruited over recent years have been young men, some as young as fourteen. This brought paramilitaries right into the classrooms.

The instability within the political process and on the streets deteriorated into sectarian confrontations on a scale worse than during the conflict and the mutation of paramilitaries into a gang culture has lead to feuds causing displacement of families and death.

B: Examining the Issues

Political and community concerns about paramilitary activity include continuing violence, intimidation, expulsions, racketeering, drug dealing and other forms of socially-harmful activities. Civic society makes no distinction between paramilitary groups, or sections of paramilitary groups, that do engage in such activities and those opposed to such activities; thus paramilitaries are all painted with broad black brush strokes.

Disaffected young people are often subject to "rough (in)justice" at the hands of paramilitaries. These activities have an impact at family and community level where parents live in fear of what their children may be involved in, and in distress at being unable to extradite their children from unlawful associations. Residents feel vulnerable and afraid to speak out against persons involved in anti-social behaviour in case the perpetrators have paramilitary connections. Again, civic society seldom distinguishes between those paramilitaries who have endorsed non-violent alternatives to "rough (in)justice" and those who have not endorsed alternative approaches.

Notwithstanding media speculation and genuine community concerns, the actual nature and extent of paramilitary activity has never been measured. The majority of alleged paramilitary activities are unreported, unrecorded and therefore unavailable in the form of official statistical evidence. Statistics showing notifiable offences recorded by the PSNI and other statutory bodies are often the tip of the iceberg and are generally lower than statistics gleaned through interaction with people living in vulnerable communities and housing estates. Likewise, statistics showing the outputs and outcomes of community-based conflict transformation initiatives have never been properly analysed or evaluated. Identification of paramilitary activities, and their impact at community level, comes mainly through the lived experience of our members and community contacts. Yet we have never actually measured the actual nature and extent of these activities in global terms.

A few academic studies have been undertaken but they are fraught with generalisations and they lack proposals for remedial action. A confidential unpublished report by Dr Marie Smyth of the Institute for Conflict Research highlights the concerns of her interviewees in relation to both the recruitment of young people into paramilitary organisations and the socially harmful activities that flow from such involvement. Ms Smyth does not, however, offer any insights into conflict transformation initiatives aimed at addressing the issues raised in her report. A report prepared by the Office of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict expresses

concern that the recruitment and use of children by paramilitaries was on the rise in Northern Ireland. Again, the report does not offer any insights into the internal paramilitary debate around the reasons for this phenomenon; nor does it examine any of the conflict transformation initiatives aimed at addressing this.

A preliminary research report on "Violence & Identity in Northern Ireland" by Dr. Nils Zurawski of the University of Munster, Germany, highlights some of the issues arising from paramilitary control in certain areas. Zuraski's report is based on interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, including paramilitaries and restorative justice practitioners, and is a useful starting point for further research.

Published statements made by elected representative and other civic leaders reflect political and community concerns but seldom if ever are based on intensive study; and without exception lack any meaningful proposals for remedial action. The recently published report of the International Monitoring Commission regurgitates much of what appears in the Sunday tabloids and with no credible recommendations for effective remedial action.

Academic research into the work of conflict transformation programmes being developed by loyalist ex. Prisoners, former activists and, indeed, current activists has been limited to local programme evaluations carried out for funding bodies; and these tend to focus on "number crunching" rather than on impact assessment.

C: Responses

The general response to paramilitary-type activity by civic society has been to condemn, to demonise and to write off loyalism as being dysfunctional – the "poor white trash" of post-agreement Ulster. There appears to be a feeling that loyalism in general, and loyalist paramilitaries in particular, are beyond redemption. Thus, the day-to-day work of ex prisoner groups and other community-based conflict transformation initiatives are dismissed as being irrelevant and are therefore under-resourced. Indeed civic society and the media are openly hostile to such initiatives, and several funding bodies pursue a subtle policy of political vetting against ex prisoner groups. Consequently the impact of ex. prisoner and other community-based conflict transformation initiatives is seldom recognised and validated. Indeed the government-backed IMC Report is clearly dismissive of such initiatives and is adamant that they should cease to be supported.

While we would like to wave a magic wand and make the legacies of the conflict disappear, that's not going to happen. The echelons of paramilitaries who want to transform from conflict need the support to encourage as many people within them as possible to embrace positive change.

We believe that those progressive elements within loyalist communities, including ex. prisoners and key influencers within the UVF and RHC, who are committed to the transformation of loyalist paramilitaries are having a positive input at both paramilitary and community level. These individuals and the initiatives with which they are involved have the potential to transform an important constituent within loyalist paramilitarism. In particular, we believe that the work of Northern Ireland Alternatives and its several satellite projects, together with the work of EPIC (Ex. Prisoner Interpretative Centre) and several church and community projects being developed by members of the Progressive Unionist Party are having a positive and a measurable impact in terms of conflict transformation.

It is essential that Government formally recognises, validates and resources the work of these and other such groups. To that end we propose that Government endorses and resources a Task Force comprised of key civil servants and key loyalist influencers, with a credible independent chair, to conduct a detailed study of both the nature and extend of paramilitarism and of the impact of existing initiatives that have the potential to transform loyalist paramilitarism.

D: Strategic Statement

The Task Force will work with academics and research assistants* in an action research programme to:-

- a) Measure the actual extent and impact of paramilitary activity within loyalist communities. This should include an assessment of the goodwill (or otherwise) within the UVF/RHC to engage in a positive conflict transformation programme.
- b) Conduct an audit of credible existing conflict transformation initiatives being developed by groups like Alternatives, EPIC and individuals associated with the PUP; together with an in-depth evaluation of their impact at both paramilitary and community level in terms of actual transformation, and of the obstacles which they are seeking to overcome; This element of the research should also look at the definition of the term "conflict transformation" and at the practice developed locally by practitioners.
- c) Calculate the potential for large-scale transformation if those initiatives that are having an impact locally were to be properly resourced and enabled to engage in a long-term strategy for change; and
- d) Recommend, on the strength of a positive report, that those community-based initiatives that have the potential to inculcate positive change and that are operating on principles of best practice in terms of management and programme delivery are properly resourced to embark upon a long-term (5 year minimum) strategic programme of conflict transformation aimed at transforming loyalist paramilitarism.

Note: * Research Assistants should ideally be drawn from the ex. prisoner community. This would be crucial in providing a 'passport' into the paramilitary community for the academics. It would also provide hands on training in research techniques for local people and would allow the community to have a sense of ownership of the programme.

E: Action Plan

- a) Establish a Task Force comprised of civil servants and the representatives of key conflict transformation initiatives.
- b) Recruit a dynamic individual to serve as an independent chair and to help drive the initiative.
- c) Identify priorities for the Action Research Programme.
- d) Draft Terms of Reference for the Researcher(s).
- e) Set budget and secure the funding to ensure that the Research Programme can be properly undertaken and a final report published.
- f) Advertise the invitation for academic-practitioners to tender.

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- g) Conduct interviews and select researcher(s) and assistants.
- h) Monitor the research
- i) Receive Interim Updates and Final Report
- j) Publish Report
- k) Lobby for adequate resources to enable recommendations to be implemented.

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