Ulster Volunteer Force Prisoners of War
UVF

Billy Boomer, 1952 - 1995
A Prisoner

Submission to the Northern Ireland Office by the Progressive Unionist Party on the Question of Political Prisoners and Prisons
PUP

Culture Behind The Wire
Martin Snodden

Loyalist Prisoners Welfare Association
LPWA

Ulster's Protestant Working Class:
A Community Exploration
Michael Hall

Progressive Unionist Party Conference
William Smith

The Beast that Is 'H' Block
A Prisoner

The Man from Cell 15
A Prisoner

A Loyal Heart
A Prisoner
On the 1st of July 1914 many sons of Ulster laid down their lives at the Somme. Very few homes throughout the Province were untouched by the slaughter that took place on that fateful morn. In honour of those who died, and those who laid down their lives in the twenty-five year war we have just endured, Ulster Volunteer Force prisoners in Long Kesh were given the following oration.

This gathering today is so very important to us. Today, we remember the tremendous sacrifice made by fellow Ulstermen all those many years ago on a foreign battlefield. That bloody conflagration, that hell on earth was to be the war to end all wars. Alas, we know better. Bravery, duty, and loyalty were the watchwords of these proud and ordinary souls from our country. Their lives were to be ended or never be the same again as they left our streets, the shipyard, the mills, and the fields of home.

Their cause, for King and Country, had also a driving element, that of ensuring the continuance of Northern Ireland (as it was to become) as an integral part of the United Kingdom. The awful price paid by the brave Ulster soldiers is legend. That price will remain with us for ever as we contemplate the stench of rat-infested trenches and the inhuman conditions that governed their lives. How was the smell of rotting flesh and the mixture of gripping fear interspersed with memories of home and loved ones, perhaps never to be seen again.

Our tribute to those brave soldiers is true and honest, and whilst we can only imagine the indescribable suffering they endured, we certainly can, and do understand and identify with their cause. In a different era, we too have fought a war to defy the bully, the political thug who would rail against the democratic wishes of our people. We also know only too well the devious skill of the enemy. We also have chosen to fight rather than to capitulate to the fascist tendencies of Irish Nationalism.

We, the Ulster Volunteer Force, to a man and woman have made conscious decisions to take the fight to the enemy with many, many decisive results. Alas, we have not come through the battle of the past quarter century unscathed. Those comrades lost to us will remain in our hearts for ever. Their sacrifices testify to the preparedness of Ulstermen of whatever generation to stand for freedom and dignity for our people. They, our brave fallen, together with our incarcerated battalion, epitomize the drive and selfless adherence to duty.
The times have been hard. We still struggle to achieve the return to the bosom of the family and community of those who have given so much for the cause that is Ulster. But, the Brigade Staff of the Ulster Volunteer Force will never rest until every single political prisoner under their authority is free to live a normal and just life, and, against a background of hope, rise to that task with a vigour previously unknown. The desire to create for our people a wholesome society burns within us all. That quest can only ever be completed with the breath of freedom for our Volunteers, all of our Volunteers.

Be assured that no day passes without every endeavour being made to further that aim. Many factors complicate the issue of political prisoner release. Each new day brings hope alternating with frustration. The many-faceted process gripping the attention of our small country is complicated and therefore difficult. We entered that process with complete honour and assure each and every Volunteer of our intention to emerge from this process with that honour intact.

The citizenry of Northern Ireland have suffered more than their fair share of political skullduggery, betrayal, and siege. It is the intent of this organisation to lift the siege, challenge those guilty of skullduggery, those who fear change because of personal interest, and to ensure that no power in our society dare betray the people of this beautiful country. The lust for a true and lasting peace is fierce among the Loyalists of Ulster. Every action of this organisation is in direct response to the desires of the people. That has always been, and will always be, the role of the Ulster Volunteer Force.

This year of 1996 should be a year of destiny. It will also be a time of great fear because there is yet no absolute vision of settlement. All in this community, with its divided traditions, are plotting course in uncharted waters. There exists the need for great vision and exemplary bravery as we all proceed towards the future. There will be those who will hide behind the mask of fraudulent piety, those great moralists who insist that their own hands are clean but that all others bear the guilt of a whole society. Their failure to deliver our people from pain and tragedy is manifest. They must move! They will move.

The Ulster Volunteer Force will create vision and will continue to act bravely. We will do so because of the sense of duty we feel to the Ulster people. The sacrifices made light the path to the future. The love and affection we all feel for those who cannot be with us on this or any day will ensure that our sense of duty is enhanced. All of our ranks have a role to play in the future of our nation.

For they shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning.
We shall remember them.
Lest We Forget

Twelve months ago, our organisation displayed immense foresight and courage by declaring an end to the armed campaign against Republican and Nationalist Violence being waged against our people, after safeguards had been given by the British Government which secured our status within the United Kingdom, whilst the greater number of people so desired it.

Lest We Forget

Today, 12 months onward representatives of our organisations continue to show courage and foresight, despite being branded as traitors and government agents, by the same people whose sole interest is to instil fear in our people by constant threats of a mythical United Ireland.

Lest We Forget

For over 25 years, our organisations have stood firm in the face of the Republican onslaught on our people and country. Our volunteers have been shot dead in the streets of Northern Ireland, assassinated in their homes, our cities have been obliterated by bombs and rockets. Our volunteers have resisted these atrocities with relentless determination, and retaliated unremittingly against the enemies of our people.

Lest We Forget

Ulster Prisons continue to remain the production lines for our volunteers for over 25 years. Families and friends of our Volunteers have suffered the hardships and unhappiness throughout these long years, whilst these same politicians defame our prisoners and representatives who have had the tenacity to move our country forward with their progressive approach, for new, more important needs of our people. Not one of these politicians from the mainstream Unionist Parties has called for the release of one single Loyalist Prisoner.
Our organisation must now continue to fight on a more comprehensive field. Besides strengthening our status within the United Kingdom, talks are urgently needed to alleviate old-founded suspicions of our people. Only with dialogue and the new progressive approach taken by our organisation can we hope to consolidate our people, and advance the peace of our country into a new era. Opportunities must be seized whilst the guns remain silent.
We are gathered here today to pay tribute to Billy Boomer, not just as the man but as a dedicated true and loyal soldier who loved his country and the cause he served with equal dedication and distinction. Billy first joined 'Tara' in 1969, being recruited in Clifton Street Orange Hall, where he was a member of his Local Orange Lodge at the tender age of 17. He later joined “S” company 1st battalion, Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). Later transferring to “A” company UVF 1st battalion, he served as a dedicated volunteer, always able and willing to fight against brutal Republican aggression.

Billy was arrested in January 1973 for the possession of arms and was sentenced to nine years imprisonment. During his incarceration, Billy spent 10 months in solitary confinement for the principles he so dearly loved, having refused cooperation with the prison authorities over the death of an informer on the UVF wing. Billy showed great fortitude at this time - a time of severe pressure during which May, his beloved wife, gave birth to their first son William 'Junior.' Such was the character and conviction of the man that he refused to talk, and with exemplary dignity, completed an horrific period of solitary confinement - a true act of loyalty and dedication.

Billy was subsequently released from prison in August 1978 and immediately returned to his active service unit, where he served until the ceasefire with the utmost distinction, courage, and dedication with results that classify him as a true soldier of Ulster. Focusing all his efforts with purpose and foresight, he believed that, in the final analysis, there was no substitute for diligence and preparation. This was evident throughout Billy’s life. Billy was held in profound esteem for his honesty, dedication, and true camaraderie. That admiration for a proud volunteer ensures that he will live with us forever.

As we know, Billy died tragically whilst holidaying in Spain with his family. With his tragic passing died a true soldier of the Ulster Volunteer Force. Only history will recall the true and committed role Billy played in the defense of his beloved Ulster. But, we who are left can reflect that, without men of the character and standing of Billy Boomer, the goals that we set would have been so much harder to achieve. So let us remember him as he died - a loving husband - a loving father - a friend - a comrade - a soldier of the Ulster Volunteer Force.
They shall not grow old, as we that are
Left grow old
Age shall not weary them, nor the years
Condemn
At the going down of the sun and in the
Morning we will remember them
For God and Ulster!
Submission to the
Northern Ireland Office by the
Progressive Unionist Party on the
Question of Political Prisoners and Prisons

PUP, Stormont,
January 12, 1995

PREAMBLE

The Oxford Dictionary lists emergency as 'sudden state of danger or conflict etc., requiring immediate action.' There is ample evidence during the past twenty-five years of upheaval within Northern Ireland, and farther afield, to dictate that this period be described as 'emergency.' The reactions of government to the seemingly continuous 'state of emergency' have been many and varied. Copious acts of Parliament have been created to complement the actions of the Security Forces, the Judiciary, and the Prison Regimes.

A substantial array of legislation exists, or has existed, with the dubious titles: Temporary Provisions, Emergency Provisions, Special Diplock Courts, Special Powers, Scheduled Offences, Special Offences and Forfeiture, Exclusion, Special Custodial Environments, etc. Over many years, the exceptional laws for exceptional times have been reshaped. They have constantly been renewed with little difficulty, irrespective of their detrimental effect upon human rights. There has been scant regard for the perception of permanency which undoubtedly exists given the ripe old of these 'temporary,' 'emergency' provisions. These provisions were maintained throughout the 'Normalisation.' Therefore, 'Ulsterisation policies resulted in the Special/Temporary/Emergency being accepted as the 'norm,' or disguised as the 'norm.' Indeed, such is the wide-spread acceptance of this form of legislation that some of it no longer requires review in Parliament and therefore can exist in perpetuity.

Thankfully, times change! The two ceasefires of August and October by the IRA and the CLMC have heralded a time of hope for all of the people of the British Isles. The sense of change is evident in the everyday lives of the inhabitants of these islands who, but a few short months ago, would not have believed the 'dream of peace' possible. The Progressive Unionist Party acknowledges that the people of Northern Ireland have some serious reservations still about the future. However, as is the case with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, they would seem in the main to accept 'the working assumption' that the ending of hostilities is permanent.
The Progressive Unionist Party believe that there is a real opportunity to create, for the first time, a truly wholesome society in Northern Ireland. Bravery and vision are required if we are to transform the sectarian mindset to that of tolerance and understanding. The ‘shallow’ politics of this portion of the United Kingdom have served the people badly. In the hope of creating an honourable society representative of the diversity of its people, it is the sincere wish of this political party that no section of our people should be omitted from the molding of its future.

The violent, political disturbance of the past leaves us all with an awful inheritance. Loved-ones of the victims of the ‘war’ cling to memories which they cherish as well as the pain of great loss. Some will use those memories as a ‘political football.’ All sections of this community have suffered. No grouping can monopolise pain or tragedy. Now is the time to build. Now is the time to face up to the difficulties and emotional strains of the past.

The issue of prisoners will cause much emotion within the community. However, it is a thorny problem which will not easily be dismissed. The Progressive Unionist Party considers the prisoners a vital ingredient in the further consolidation of the peace process. During our deliberations which made the CLMC ceasefire possible, it was evident to us that the prisoners were very positive in relation to the ending of hostilities. We conclude also that the very special circumstances which have prevailed for so long have changed. Those political groupings which have stepped back from the abyss are, we are told, believed by Her Majesty’s Government (HMG). That being the case, and since the government accepts that violence carried out by CLMC prisoners was on the specific direction of those groupings, then it surely follows that no such direction will happen in the future. If the violence has ceased, and the threat of violence removed, then the possibility of recidivism is abrogated.

During the period of the ‘troubles,’ there has been much attention focused on prisons. The prison population has very clearly reflected the level of strife afflicting Northern Ireland. Today as we discuss this contentious issue, there are thousands of ex-prisoners playing a full and meaningful role in many walks of life. The politicisation of prisoners, the prison culture of equality, and the experience itself of prison carried to the wider community very often has had, and continues to have, a most positive effect. The community has not spurned those men and women. Indeed, the opposite is the case.

The Progressive Unionist Party regards that the ‘emergency’ is over. Alas, another danger still exists! It is imperative that there is generated a genuine assumption that the peace process can and will address all matters, however difficult. The Progressive Unionist Party considers as central to the cementing of a peace process a speedy, satisfactory, and honourable resolution to the question of political prisoners. Those who cannot or will not countenance movement on those points, which take this community towards normality, bear
Progressive Unionist Party

a heavy responsibility. The loud fraudulent piety has all been heard before. HMG must be resolute in ensuring the best possible chance for conciliation ... not revenge!

Amnesty

The Progressive Unionist Party calls for the release and resettlement of all persons incarcerated for activities carried out in the cause and furtherance of the armed political conflict in Northern Ireland. The violent nature of the political conflict in the Province during the past twenty-five years, together with the progressive development of a culture of violence which has affected the whole of society, is responsible for the fact that so many men and women have been imprisoned for activities related to that conflict. That the special nature of the conflict has already been recognised by HMG is evident from the special legislation introduced by successive parliaments to help address the problem of violence. The Progressive Unionist Party now asks HMG to recognise that, since the several parties formerly engaged in the armed conflict have themselves agreed to resolve their political disagreements through the democratic process, the totality of special legislation should be rescinded and those imprisoned as a consequence of it should be released. Such a response would show consistency on the part of HMG in relation to its justification for the introduction and implementation of emergency legislation.

Now that the combatant groups to which the prisoners belong are no longer engaged in armed activities, there are legitimate reasons why HMG should embark upon a process which would lead to the phased release and resettlement of prisoners:

- The use of imprisonment as a means of deterrence is no longer applicable since the combatant forces are now committed to the democratic process and do not, therefore, need to be deterred from continuing with the armed conflict.

- With political dialogue replacing armed conflict on the agenda of their respective reference groups, the use of imprisonment as a means of protecting society from the possibility of released prisoners becoming re-involved in the armed conflict is no longer valid.

- The consolidation of the ceasefire and the development of a new era of peace and stability requires a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation which ought to override any desire on the part of society for exacting retribution from prisoners. To demand retribution only from those who have been apprehended for their participation in the armed conflict is tantamount to excusing
the excesses of those whose rhetoric and intransigence allowed the crisis to degenerate from constitutional politics to armed conflict in the first place. No one section of the community, certainly not the prisoners, should be asked to carry the burden of guilt for the violence of the past twenty-five years. Attempts to bring about a restoration of normality in local communities cannot be achieved while families within those communities suffer the ongoing trauma and deprivation associated with the imprisonment of a loved one.

- The release of prisoners will help to facilitate the transformation of the political conflict at grass-roots level from one of violence to one of political dialogue. There is an abundance of evidence to show that former prisoners have been key players in brokering the ceasefire and are now active in seeking to encourage the politicisation of paramilitary organisations.

The credibility and influence of released prisoners at community level, together with the goodwill generated through their relatives and reference groups, will be crucial to the former combatant groups in their efforts to support the conflict transformation process at grass-roots level.

The Progressive Unionist Party accepts that the phased release of prisoners must be achieved through the due process of law, and we believe that this can indeed be achieved. An acknowledgment by both HMG and the majority of the constitutional parties in the United Kingdom, that the conflict has genuinely been transformed from violence to political dialogue, should allow HMG to (a) rescind both the Emergency Provisions Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and (b) initiate a review of all cases of persons who have been imprisoned as a consequence of such legislation. Legislation to facilitate the release of prisoners whose cases were reviewed under such a process could be introduced at the same time

**INTERIM POSITION ON THE RESOLUTION OF PRISONERS**

**Increase in the Amount of Remission.**

Due to the atmosphere of violence and political instability, the Emergency Provisions Act was implemented with a vigour that, at times, has led to incorrect and heavy sentencing. At regular periods over the years, many scheduled offenses had the maximum sentence doubled or trebled. As a result, sentencing in cases concerning scheduled offences became grossly exaggerated in comparison with equivalent non-scheduled cases.

It is our opinion that many people have been sentenced to longer periods due to the fact that their offences were categorised as scheduled. Therefore, in a post ceasefire situation, the most logical step to address this imbalance would
be to increase the amount of remission on sentences. In the past the level of remission has varied according to different government desires, and it is our belief that there should be an immediate increase of remission to 66%. This would be retrospective.

**Reduction in Criteria for Work-Out Scheme.**

The present amount of time a person has to serve before they can be considered for the work-out scheme should be decreased to 7 years. Life sentence prisoners have a credulous record in the work-out scheme, and in the absence of violence, there is no danger of them becoming involved. Loyalist paramilitaries stated publicly in 1986 (reiterated again in 1987) that 'it is policy that their organisation prohibit life-sentence prisoners from re-entering their organisation.'

**Reduction in Criteria for Parole**

At present, prisoners must be into the last year of their sentence before they are considered for parole. In the light of new developments and reasons given in previous and succeeding paragraphs, prisoners should be considered for parole after they have completed 33% of their *effective* sentence.

**Increase in the Amount of Parole**

At present prisoners are only allowed bi-yearly or annual parole. This could and should be increased incrementally in proportion to *effective* time served.

**Reduction of Review Board Criteria**

**Prior to Appearance of Life-Sentenced Prisoners**

At present, people serving indeterminate sentences are required to serve 10 years as a prerequisite to appearing before the Life Sentence Review Board. In the light of a new atmosphere, there is no risk or likelihood of lifers becoming involved in violent acts for two reasons: because of the ceasefire, and because paramilitaries prohibit lifers from rejoining their organisations. Recognising these points and assurances, we believe that prisoners serving indeterminate sentences should go before the Review Board after serving five years of their sentence. SOSPs should be treated in comparative terms.

**Long-Term Prisoners**

While dealing mostly with life sentence prisoners in previous paragraphs, the question of long-term prisoners needs to be addressed. Long-term prisoners,
whose effective sentence exceeds the criteria pertaining to life-sentenced prisoners, should also be included in work-out schemes because the same considerations that apply to life-sentence prisoners also apply to long-term prisoners.

More Liberal Approach to Medical and Compassionate Leave

Compassionate leave should be widened to include the extended family. The length of parole for compassionate leave should be a minimum of one week.

Medical Parole. Prisoners undergoing medical treatment should be given parole before they return to prison.

The LPWA and Prisoners

Over the past 25 years, the contribution made by the LPWA in reducing the hardship of prisoners' families has been tremendous, and quite often, the only source of comfort for these innocent victims. The assistance from the early years in transport, comfort, and general welfare has filled and continues to fill a large gap where government bodies have failed. During that time, the vast majority of that work has been done without any support from anyone other than themselves. Therefore, both the role the LPWA has played and the important role it still has to play in the resolution of the prisoners' issues should be acknowledged:

- The LPWA should be given full recognition as the legitimate welfare representatives of UVF and RJC Political Prisoners.
- The LPWA should be given pragmatic support in the appropriation of premises and equipment to run their offices.
- The LPWA should be given the financial support to maintain their offices and services to prisoners.
- The LPWA representatives should be given access rights on to prisoners' wings.
- Resettlement programmes should be instituted in conjunction with the LPWA.
- Resettlement programmes should include educational and retraining schemes with full consultation and participation of prisoners and the LPWA.
- There should be regular meetings between the LPWA representatives and the Prisoner representatives.
- There should be regular meetings between the prison regime and LPWA.
OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Progressive Unionist Party is to gain recognition, support, credibility, and acceptability for welfare organisations that have, throughout the violent conflict, been the main supporting agencies for the Political Prisoners and their families. The PUP are particularly interested in the Loyalist Prisoners Welfare Association. It is the belief of the PUP that the LPWA should be recognised as the legitimate welfare representatives of UVF and RHC Political Prisoners. The negativity of HMG toward the LPWA is causing widespread frustration and disappointment amongst both prisoners and their families, and the PUP are concerned lest this should lead to a wider disaffection throughout the welfare association and the community.

Throughout the past 25 years, the contribution played by the LPWA in reducing the hardships of political prisoners families has been overwhelming and, quite often, the only source of comfort for these innocent victims. The assistance from the early years in providing transport, comfort, and general welfare has filled and continues to fill a large gap where government sponsored bodies have fallen short. During that time, the vast majority of that work has been carried out voluntarily without ‘outside’ government support. The LPWA is currently playing a proactive role in seeking to convince ordinary people of the need to regard the release of political prisoners as being an integral part of the peace process. In the mean time, they have been at the forefront in campaigning for better conditions for political prisoners – a basic human right.

It should be noted that the recidivism rate of political prisoners is minimal. This is largely due to the counselling and assistance of the LPWA. Therefore, it should be acknowledged by HMG the role the LPWA has played and the very important role it still has to play in the resolution of the prisoners’ issue. It is a vehicle through which prisoners upon release can be positively and constructively channelled.

The LPWA primarily assist political prisoners throughout four recognized phases of incarceration and release: detention and arrest, remand, sentence, and release. All of the work that the LPWA undertakes is on a voluntary basis and is difficult to quantify. What follows is an attempt to give an indication of work that has been carried out.

Detention and Arrest

Whenever political prisoners are detained, they immediately request that their family and friends contact their chosen prison welfare association. This they do because they:

*Trust that organisation.* The trust is based on the fact that the prisoners will know and will have socialised with the voluntary workers within the chosen welfare organisation and who reside in the local community. In most cases, the voluntary workers will have endured a similar experience.
Availability of LPWA volunteer workers. They are easily accessible 24 hours a day.

Confidentiality of LPWA. The detainee knows that he can confide in the voluntary worker without fear of incrimination or prejudice.

Services: Legal Advice and Assistance

Detention and Arrests. Upon being contacted by a detainee’s relative, the relevant prison welfare association immediately contacts a solicitor, requesting his presence at the relevant holding centre to assist, advise, and represent the detainee.

Remand. The LPWA maintain contact with the political prisoners on remand and with their solicitors, ensuring that the prisoners receive as much legal support and assistance as is available. They also assist the legal advisers in collating any necessary information in order to assist the prisoners, evidently explicit in the supergrass cases.

Sentence. The LPWA assists and supports political prisoners who have been sentenced and who have challenged those sentences by appeals. The LPWA liaise with the legal advisers and the prisoners in a similar manner to that of prisoners on remand. This again has been very much in evidence with supergrass cases.

Release. When a prisoner is released and requires any advice on his legal position, such as a prisoner released on licence, or when and if a sentence is likely to become a spent sentence, it is the LPWA that he contacts to establish the relevant information. If they do not have the information, then the LPWA acquires the relevant material on behalf of the licensed prisoner. The LPWA frequently advises indeterminate sentenced prisoners released on licence on how best to surmount problems of discrimination when seeking employment.

Counselling Families

Detention and Arrest. The LPWA maintains constant contact with the detainees’ families interpreting any legal information they may have received and advising them on how best to cope. They give the families moral support and refer them to others who have undergone a similar experience.

Remand. Relatives of political prisoners remanded in custody are generally in a state of shock and require quite intensive support and advice on the relevant requirements of the prisoner. Remand prisoners’ families seek advice, assist-
ance, and counselling from the LPWA voluntary workers with whom they have been in contact. They also attempt to involve the families in voluntary work in order to take their minds off their plight.

**Sentenced.** The preparatory work by the LPWA when the prisoner is at the remand stage stands him and his family in good stead after the prisoner has been sentenced. However, because of the abnormal rate of marital break-up of long-term and life-sentenced prisoners, the demands made upon the marriage counselling services of the LPWA are quite intense and many resources are expended. Spouse depression, unruliness and child truancy, debt and inability to cope are but a few of the contributory factors with which the LPWA have to contend.

**Release.** The LPWA have in place a series of schemes for the preparation of the prisoner and his family in relation to his eventual release and after-care. There are many schemes that vary in relation to characteristics of the prisoner, his family, and his specific circumstances. They range from the referral to the practical. Due to the material constraints placed upon the LPWA, any help other than advice and referral is minimal, which should not be the case when the successful social reintegration of a long-term prisoner is involved.

**Material Assistance**

**Detention and Arrest.** The LPWA recognises that, when potential political prisoners have been arrested, their families and dependents are immediately faced with an economic burden. The role of the LPWA becomes vital since they play a pivotal part in the advice and guidance, in what are usually unprecedented circumstances as far as the detainee and his family are concerned. Required consumables of whatever kind are supplied as well as transport for ferrying purposes. There is a material vacuum which the statutory bodies do not consider.

**Remands.** The LPWA provides the political prisoners with practical consumables and a change of clothing for their new environment. They reduce the financial burden on the prisoners’ families with parcels, clothing, etc. This assistance is related to the prisoners’ dependencies on the outside. It also allows the prisoner and his family to retain a certain amount of dignity and feeling of independence. Fortunately or unfortunately, such assistance from the LPWA is often viewed now as a right because of the way it has been administered. Sometimes these obligations cannot be fulfilled and this, in turn, creates hardship.

**Sentenced.** The assistance available from the LPWA to sentenced persons is not different from that of those on remand. Both sets of prisoners and their
families receive extra pragmatic assistance at special times of the year such as Easter and Christmas. If any of the families approach the LPWA with any special economic problems or requirements, they are sympathetically received.

Released. Upon release, there is special help facility commensurate with the amount of time served and contingent on the dependency that exists within the family unit. This has proven to be very beneficial, especially in the case of political prisoners who served indeterminate sentences. The released political prisoner invariably obtains a more enhanced consideration from the LPWA than they would from statutory agencies funded for that specific purpose.

Transport

Detention and Arrest. The LPWA provides transport for families to and from the holding centres. They provide transport for the delivery of any of the clothing and consumables required by the prisoners at the holding centres.

Remand. The LPWA have transport laid on for the families of remand prisoners. This transport is available every day of the week and is a necessity that the families have come to expect. There is no charge to the families or the prisoners for the use of such transport unlike transport facilities laid on by any other well-meaning and voluntary agencies. Because remand prisoners have three visits a week, and because they are housed in Long Kesh/Maze, the cost of transport and fuel is prohibitive and causes hardship, since this is an area inadequately covered by government legislation. Consequently, some recognition of and practical support for the LPWA from the government should be forthcoming as soon as possible. There is precedence for such governmental recognition and monetary assistance.

Sentenced. The LPWA have supplied transport to and from Long Kesh/Maze since political prisoners were first transferred to that location in December, 1972. Special buses are deployed for the days of heavy visiting demands and other modes of transport are in operation for the lighter days to make the service viable. Transport has always been supplied by the LPWA for ferrying parolees to and from the various locations of incarceration. Let it be unequivocally stated that the families and friends of any prisoner of whatever category have never, ever, been denied passage to and from any prison.

Released. The families tend to look for a family member to provide transport on such a special occasion. If, however, this is not possible, the LPWA cater to their individual needs.
OTHER AGENCIES

The Progressive Unionist Party recognise that there are government funded statutory and voluntary agencies offering only partial services comparable to those supplied by the political prisoners welfare associations. The reality, however, is that such governmental agencies are rarely utilised. The prisoners and their families prefer the consistency and reliability of the LPWA. Whereas government agencies supply the necessary vouchers to allow the families of remand prisoners 13 visits per year, there is the opportunity for those families, if they so wish, to visit the prisoner one 150 times per year, since the remand prisoner is entitled by law to three visits per week. Twelve to eighteen months spent on remand in Northern Ireland is very common. There is a gross statutory shortfall in this regard and such a parsimonious approach could certainly not be construed as contributing to marital and family perpetuity. Too, in the case of the sentenced prisoner who is entitled to a weekly visit amounting to 52 visits per year the governmental bodies only provide the financial resources for thirteen visits per year and then only after stifling and tedious bureaucracy. Is it any wonder that the families and friends of the prisoners prefer the more humane and pragmatic approach of the LPWA?

LPWA Requirements

The LPWA require the same kind of recognition, support, and financial assistance the government funded agencies already in existence received, without having the bureaucracy or stigmatisation of attempting to criminalise the political prisoners they are servicing.

The LPWA should be recognised as the welfare representatives of UVF and RHC Political Prisoners. With this recognition they should be furnished with the same credibility and financial requirements and assistance the currently funded agencies receive. The other agencies recognise the necessity to work with, sometimes closely, the relevant political prisoners’ welfare associations. In particular, the Quakers have had and provided a fair amount of recognition to the work that organisations like the LPWA carry out.

The LPWA should be given material support in the appropriation of premises and equipment to run their offices. The LPWA have always had to work in difficult conditions and have never been able to afford the luxury of working in presentable professional surroundings. Such situations add to the inability to centralise and quantify the work they carry out. The finances they manage to accrue are directed to the people they are involved in helping; therefore, if
the government intends to tackle the prison situation, they should assist in professionalising the conditions in which the LPWA work. This refers to the actual, physical office equipment, environment, and working conditions and does not require the granting of finances for such equipment, since the government could provide, and indeed should feel compelled to provide, such equipment.

_The financial support to maintain and manage offices._ Unfortunately such administrations do have financial overheads, such as short-life equipment, running costs, and staffing costs. There are several benefits to be gained here for financial investment from the government. They can provide employment for people who are engaged in meaningful positive work within the community, people whose work has previously gone unrecorded, unrecognised, and therefore, unsupported by the establishment. They can offer these people a feeling of support and recognition for their positive contribution to society. Most of those involved in such activities have been through the system and deserve the credit for what they have achieved and could contribute to the peace process.

_The necessary grants to maintain their services to prisoners._ There is a fair amount of detail in the services offered to political prisoners and their families from the LPWA included in this document already. Such services are carried out on shoestring budgets and depend on contributions from the local community to render them possible. They could be greatly enhanced and sustained by grants from the government for the remainder of the duration of the current political prisoners’ incarceration and release programmes, programmes that should be developed in conjunction with representatives of the LPWA. Precedents have been set in the past when the government grant aided political prisoner welfare associations for assistance with transport.

_At the base of these propositions is our firm suggestion that governmental agencies are at liberty to employ any overseeing body and any means of accountability they so wish in order to bring to fruition this meaningful and necessary aspiration. We are amenable to any worthwhile proposal._

_The LPWA representatives should be given access rights to prisoners' wings._ The PUP feel that to ensure proper, sensible resettlement programmes and decent prison conditions during the interim period, representatives from the LPWA should be permitted access rights to prison wings. Such recognition for political prisoners welfare associations can act as stabilising influences within the prison by letting the prisoners see that their welfare confidants are being awarded the same rights and conditions as the statutory and voluntary agencies currently funded by the government. The welfare associations can also better prepare the prisoners for resettlement into a changing society.
Resettlement programmes to be done in conjunction with the LPWA. Because of the relationship between the LPWA, political prisoners and former political prisoners, the PUP feel it a necessity to include the LPWA in any proposed discussions for the resettlement of political prisoners. The PUP feels that the trust, experience, availability, and confidence that the prisoners and their families have in the LPWA has certainly earned them the credibility within the community affected by such programmes.

Resettlement programmes to include educational and retaining schemes with full consultation and participation of prisoners and the LPWA.

Regular meetings between the LPWA representatives and the Prisoner representatives. Though regular meetings take place between political prisoners representatives and the LPWA representatives, in the event of an anticipated resettlement programme, more frequent and in-depth meetings would be required. Such meetings should take place in a relaxed atmosphere and not in the rushed facilities of the normal prison visits, inconveniencing the normal family visits for both prisoners and their families. The meetings should take place on the wings of the prisons to facilitate the prisoners and allow the LPWA to experience the conditions in which the prisoner is currently confined as Board Of Visitors and other organisations do.

Regular meetings between Prison regime and LPWA. The LPWA should have regular meetings with the prison regime in order to assist in the development of a more human prison system. Such meetings could reduce tensions between political prisoners and prison staff and reduce stress on all those involved in the system. Problems could be openly discussed and addressed by all involved and influential in the system.

CONCLUSION

This paper containing these proposals has been submitted in good faith in an attempt to inject realism into a very motive arena because, make no mistake about it, the prisons are an important and integral part of the greater arena of Northern Ireland. It would be less than circumspect for any quarter to use the Loyalist prisoners as bargaining counters or the disadvantaged half of a quid pro quo.

We would assume that many universal lessons have been learned in relation to prisons, and especially prisoners who have been imprisoned in Northern Ireland. Not least, these lessons are due to the fact that prisoners are in many ways the catalyst that can make things happen. From 1972, when Special Category came into being, up until their input into the Loyalist Ceasefire, the prisoners have played a pertinent and significant role in the affairs of our Province, and it would be folly in the extreme to under-estimate that role or the
depth of belonging and esteem in which these men are held in the affections of the Loyalist population in the working-class areas. In many ways, the Loyalist political prisoners are a vital key to unlocking some of our more problematic doors. We would wish this document to be received in the spirit in which it is presented – that of goodwill and a genuine concern to make progress.

Any confidence and trust placed in the Loyalist representatives by those to whom this paper is presented will not be abused.
The cages that were Long Kesh prison camp are empty now. Only the ghosts and memories remain of the thousands of Loyalist and Republican prisoners who were incarcerated there. On June 5, 1988, the remaining 92 special-category prisoners were moved out of the cages and into H-Block accommodation, thus ending a unique era in the history of this troubled province.

For the 16 years of its occupation as a prison camp, the ideas of it as ‘a school for subversion’ or ‘a university of terror’ were propagated by the authorities. In contrast, Secretary of State, Merlyn Rees, once commented that ‘the aimless existence followed by special category prisoners in compounds is no preparation for a return to normal living’. So just how did the men cope all those years? What did they do to avoid mental, physical, and social collapse?

From the Secretary of State, Willie Whitelaw, concession of special-category status to prisoners incarcerated as a result of the political turmoil in the province and their subsequent transfer behind the wire to the cages of Long Kesh in 1972, control over the men was governed by the command structures of the factionalised prisoners. The authorities’ role became one of containment. Loyalist and Republican factions like the UVF (where UVF, RHC, YCV, prisoners integrated under the one banner), UDA, PIRA, OIRA, and later, the IRSP, were billeted in separate cages and the responsibility for cleanliness, maintenance, discipline, and morale were all given attention by their respective officer staff.

The level of cleanliness and maintenance varied between the factions depending on the policy adopted by them. Loyalists, on one hand, chose to make their conditions as habitable as possible, and in the process, had to haggle with the prison administrators in order to obtain the basic resources of paint (allocated once per week and saved until enough was available to cover the job in hand), disinfectant, soap, and wire wool (used to remove unwanted marks on tiled floors and for the scrubbing of ovens and cookers, brushes, mops, and even the very rubbish bins). All were a source of dispute at one time or another.

Daily work parties were organised and cleaning and maintenance duties were strictly carried out. Each man was responsible for the cleanliness in his own cubicle, a 6.5-foot high, sectioned-off area from the middle of the Nissan hut measuring 9.7 foot in floor space but restricted in volume by the curve of
the hut. All areas were inspected by an officer during the work detail and extra duties often resulted for below standard conditions. On the other hand, Republican prisoners had a policy of not alleviating the conditions in which they found themselves incarcerated by their sworn enemies the British. They did, however, carry out basic cleaning of facilities in their cages, and each man kept himself clean. This led to great dismay amongst the prison officers and prison administrators, who often pointed an accusing finger (while still denying the Loyalists their sought-after cleaning resources!), when in embarrassment, they tried to explain to some outside visitor the contrast between Loyalist and Republican conditions.

Discipline was an ever-present factor in the daily life of the prisoner, with their officers exercising complete control over their lives, indoctrinating them with their meaning for life, while on occasion training them for death. In the 1970s, military parades were fashionable, some factions held a weekly muster parade with their volunteers turning out in uniform; however, all factions held annual parades. In the Loyalist cages, these took place in July and on Remembrance Day, while the Republicans commemorated the Easter Rising in 1916. Patriots of both traditions, from all over the six countries, (Benny from Londonderry, tragically killed while making a desperate bid for freedom; Ironjaw from Antrim; the Horse from Fermanagh; Alarm Clock from Tyrone; Ralph from Armagh; Zeb from Down), and some even from Scotland (Jock and Big Bill), England (English Bob), and Southern Ireland (Tipperary Tim), gathered for their traditional parades. Flags and uniforms were prohibited by the prison officials who searched all year round for them. Union and Ulster flags, Starry Ploughs, and Tricolours were confiscated and often found their way to the prison’s black museum of memorabilia. But come a parade day, men in uniform with flags blowing in the breeze turned out in full view and in defiance of the prison authorities, taking solace and pride in their comradeship as an oration was read by some charismatic authoritarian leader of either a green or orange hue.

Since the Secretaries of State’s, Merlyn Rees (1976) and Humphrey Atkins (1980), rulings to deny to political prisoners special-category status, the numbers incarcerated in the cages decreased as the 1970s ended. The 1980s began with conflict within the cages on the acceptability of case reviews for life sentenced prisoners. This development marked the dawn of a new era for the men in the cages.

Regimental lifestyles that had existed were replaced with a commune-type existence where issues were openly discussed and a consensus of opinion sought and acted upon. Interaction between the factions, most notably between the UVF and the OIRA, increased and tribal feuds were submerged in political views which were amongst the most moderate and radical in the country.

With Nationalists publicly espousing their credited phrase ‘ourselves alone,’ and Loyalists knowing the reality of its meaning, having been betrayed by their
political leaders and finding themselves in the most unpleasant situation of being imprisoned by their fellow countrymen for fighting for their people. How much more remarkable it is then that their general morale remained buoyant in the face of adversity.

Throughout the 1980s, they occupied themselves not by plotting and planning anyone’s downfall, even though they endured unimaginable pettiness and psychological stress from members of the prison regime who tried to intimidate them into submission, but by continuing to cultivate their minds. Academic education, handicrafts, sport, and health and fitness featured heavily in their lives.

Many partook in education. Meetings between a cage education representative and the prison education department administrator took place once a week, and over a cup of coffee, education requests forwarded by the cage rep were discussed and provisions and resources made available to enable a prisoner’s chosen passage to be as obstacle free as possible.

Most of the prisoners had no recognised academic qualifications at the time of their arrest. So over the years, full and part-time teachers were employed to go into the cages and teach eager students subjects found in any school curriculum. Irish language was surprisingly requested and taught to fainne level in a UVF cage. Some chose not to sit examinations, but a significant number did bring many achievements at ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels.

The Open University (OU), having first come into the camp in the mid-1970s for a few student prisoners, found a demand for their courses increasing in the 1980s as students climbed the academic ladder. They provided distance learning course material in prisoners’ fields of personal interest such as mathematics, sociology, computing, technology, psychology, social sciences, philosophy, and history. Also tutors were sent in from the province’s universities to discuss course units and prepare students for their three-hour examination.

After many hours of solitary study, a number of students gained the required credits to entitle them to a degree from the OU (seven UVF prisoners graduated while in cage 21), others followed up their studies on release by going into full-time education at universities at home, in Britain, and in the Republic. Some, after having achieved their first degree, carried on to Honours degrees and even to postgraduate studies in the cages.

The prisoners often joked about being a captive audience but what could not be laughed at was the dedication shown to attain a pass rate many of today’s Further Education colleges would be proud of. The wire may have restricted the movement of their bodies, but their minds knew no bounds in their hunger for knowledge.

Handicrafts such as leather craft, glass picture painting, soft-toy making, oil painting, and wood craft all require quite different skills. Yet these were all mastered by individuals throughout the camp without outside tuition and
instruction, but largely by adopting a heuristic approach. Billfolds, purses, handbags, schoolboys, and leather plaques with specialised designs modelled on them were all produced by leather-working prisoners. Glass picture painting of traditional emblems and football team badges were done and framed. Micky Mouse and Kermit the Frog were two favourites for the soft-toy makers. Magazine photographs of old masters’ paintings were expertly copied on canvas. Irish harps and gypsy caravans, churches and windmills were competently crafted from wood. All these were done within the resource constraints set by prison officials.

Choice of sport as a pastime varied in the cages, but the most popular forms were football (Loyalists played soccer, the Republicans Gaelic), snooker, darts, and it was not unknown during the summer months to see games of tennis, volleyball, and even an occasional game of cricket being played. Injuries from broken legs to fractured cheek bones bear witness to the competitive nature with which they were played.

Health and fitness consciousness came via TV, books, magazines, and a rare instructed course from some of NI’s top coaches, fuelling an already eager audience to pursue their chosen leisure activities of weight training, body building, boxing, and running (short, middle, and long distances) to a high standard. Hutchie, in his deceptive shuffling running style eating up the marathon miles as he followed the wire-cage perimeter around and around and around (seven laps to the mile) in his daily training runs, had to be seen to be believed.

But life in the cages was not always so serious. In fact, there were many light-hearted and humorous moments provided by some of the Wittiest of characters one could ever hope to meet. Like the Belfast wit when a prison officer taking details of the prisoner asked him ‘What do you call your, father?’ and he, quick as a flash, responded with ‘Daddy.’ Or the time when a certain Shankill Road man suggested to a Tigers Bay man that a wet lettuce rubbed over his body would ease his discomfort from sunburn, and then set about doing it to him to the amusement of the whole cage for weeks after. And when their brand of humour was inspired by the ‘rocket fuel’ (poteen, made, bottled, and drunk by the men), it was a night to remember and a morning-after to forget!

And who could forget the variety of pets kept by the men: budgies, canaries, parrots, cockateels, pigeons, tropical fish, and cats. All these creatures found a home and a caring keeper, not always with the approval of the prison regime.

Another caring group were the born-again Christians. These were people, who had travelled their own road to Damascus, and like Paul they were aware of the manufactured religious beliefs that existed in society, they too had to defend their spiritual faith which differed so much from established denominations. They studied religion and formed a lasting friendship with one of their Christian brothers from Belfast Bible College, and had many Bible classes and
services behind the wire attended and enjoyed by ministers of different denominations.

As the numbers went down, with the inevitable releases, all the activities previously described were carried on as best as possible. They were what made the culture that each man in his own way had contributed to, with which to be identified.

This 'Culture' is still alive and well. The remaining prisoners are a strong, cohesive unit. They needed the group strength to survive. There were times when it was hard for each man to keep going, but with emotional and material support from their families and friends on the outside and always someone to lend an ear to a troubled soul on the inside they managed. The men who have been freed admit the experience changed them as individuals and human beings. Like survivors of other battles, they do not talk much about themselves. Those who are left behind are now anxious to feel the fresh wind of freedom on their faces. In the meantime, they look through the wire to a 20-foot-high concrete wall, behind which are the empty cages, and listen to the echoes on the wind.

Abbreviations:

UVF – Ulster Volunteer Force
RHC – Red Hand Commandos
YCV – Young Citizen Volunteers
UDA – Ulster Defence Association
PIRA – Provisional Irish Republican Army
OIRA – Official Irish Republican Army
IRSP – Irish Republican Socialist Party
Over the past one-quarter of a century and more, thousands of men and women from the many Loyalist areas scattered throughout Ulster have sacrificed their liberty and their lives in defence of our country, our belief and our way of life. The LPWA was formed to meet the essential needs of prisoners and their families while they were incarcerated. From the early 1960s to the present day, it continues to provide assistance for Loyalist Prisoners and their families.

Over the years, the long arm of comfort of the L.P.W.A. has stretched over many countries and continents. From Magilligan to Crumlin Road, Barlinni to Liverpool, and from as far away as Canada to Long Kesh. The very basic needs of transportation to and from these prisoners and prison camps, food parcels, and little words of advice and encouragement have been the hallmark of the LPWA. We also help in assisting the families of the bereaved. Of course the LPWA could not have provided the facility without the support of the Loyalist people, who have continually, down through the years, supported generously like tonight, the many functions to raise funds. But our job is not finished!

Tonight we gather here in support of our fellow Loyalists in Prison, who still need our support and whose spirits still remain unbroken. It is our belief that there should be NO Loyalist prisoners incarcerated in Ulster and we will continue to campaign until every Loyalist prisoner is released. The message from our prisoners is quite simple, their principles are the same today as they were when they were arrested: 'The Constitutional position of Northern Ireland' comes first and they follow in honourable second.

Tonight you have demonstrated that Loyalist prisoners are not forgotten. Their plight is never far from our thoughts. The LPWA salutes our Prisoners and gratefully acknowledges the wonderful support over the years by you the Loyalist people.

*And hushed to rest on a Loyal breast  
And rocked on a Loyal knee  
For her dear sake no jail will break  
This Loyal heart in me.*
Ulster's Protestant Working Class: A Community Exploration

Michael Hall,

with an Introduction by

Billy Hutchinson

INTRODUCTION

In October 1992, the Springfield Inter-Community Development Project organised a conference for community groups working on both sides of the West Belfast ‘peace-line’ interface. Its purpose was to assist these groups to develop a joint strategy for tackling the common social and economic problems which beset them. However, this exploratory conference kept its agenda flexible, for it was realised that, before the two estranged communities could begin to co-operate on socio-economic issues, much fear and misunderstanding had to be confronted. The conference, therefore, allowed the delegates a chance not only to describe the problems they faced, but to voice the fears and suspicions held by their respective communities.

As the conference report clearly revealed, the depth of misunderstanding between the two communities was dramatically confirmed, with each ‘side’ revealing a confused and rudimentary appreciation of the fears and aspirations held by the other. It was also apparent that, even within each community, there was confusion and uncertainty, and the feeling that needs and aspirations had never been adequately articulated, let alone acknowledged.

The organisers decided that it would be worthwhile to assist each community in beginning such a process of articulation. As a first step, a series of meetings was held on the Shankill Road in the first half of 1994 which sought to explore the Protestant working-class experience. This essay is the product of those discussions.

The Springfield Inter-Community Development Project would hope to facilitate the same process within the Catholic working class. We believe such explorations are vital if we are ever to develop genuine inter-communal awareness, something still lacking after twenty-five years of unremitting violence. Only when our two communities face each other with honesty and openness, and with a preparedness to let dialogue replace violence, can we ever hope to transcend our present tragic circumstances.

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A Cautionary Note

A frequent complaint voiced by Northern Ireland’s Protestant working class is that media and government continually view their community in a simplistic and stereotypical manner, with little attempt made to acknowledge the diversity of experiences and opinions. As our own discussions were, of the practical necessity, focused within that section of the Protestant working class living along Belfast’s Shankill Road, we wondered whether we might fall into the same trap. For who could say whether opinions expressed along the Shankill Road necessarily reflect those of other Protestant working-class communities elsewhere throughout Northern Ireland?

Two things served to lessen our concerns. First, we acknowledged that, when the media and others use the phrase ‘the Shankill and the Falls’ as a synonym for the two working-class communities within Northern Ireland, it is not simply for the sake of a convenient label, but because it is believed that the hopes, fears, and aspirations of the people living along both those roads have indeed come to reflect closely the hopes, fears, and aspirations of Northern Ireland’s two working-class communities in general.

Second, we endeavoured to make our discussions as broadly-based as possible, and invited along individuals whom we felt would reflect a wide cross-section of opinion within the Protestant working class. To further extend our outreach, those who attended the meetings were requested to share our deliberations with their own circle of contacts, and thereby stimulate additional feedback. The organisers feel reasonably confident, therefore, that the views we managed to canvas provide us with a broad overview of Protestant working-class opinion – and the wide diversity of opinion expressed at the discussions gave ample proof of that.

The organisers express their gratitude to those who formed the core of the discussions, with a further thanks to all those who took the time to forward us written submissions. The quality of those discussions and the standard of the written submissions seem to indicate that the days of Protestant, working-class inarticulateness are at last hopefully numbered.

Cross-community worker and writer, Michael Hall, was invited to co-chair the discussions and to prepare the essay which now follows.

ACKNOWLEDGING A CRISIS …

The initial belief that there was a pressing need for the series of discussions was very soon confirmed. The early opinions and comments expressed, both within the discussion group and outside of it, gave ample indication that the Protestant working class is presently undergoing a period of unprecedented transition, one which almost warrants the label of crisis.

This crisis has engendered many different reactions within the Protestant working-class community: a numbing sense of bewilderment, an increasing feeling of demoralisation, not to mention a deep resentment and bitterness.
Amidst these disparate reactions, there are some common threads. There is the belief that, over the last twenty-five years, the Protestant working class has become increasingly isolated and marginalised. Its members feel that their deeply-held aspirations have rarely been acknowledged as legitimate by outsiders. Their ‘case’ has either been denigrated or ignored, or misrepresented by the media and government. Indeed, the media is felt to have been fixated with the cause of Irish Republicanism to the point of remaining oblivious to any suggestion that the heritage defended by Ulster’s Protestant community could be every bit as valid.

The Protestant working class and its organisations are frequently viewed, and presented, as being largely composed of bigoted reactionaries, whose prime motivation is to prevent the Catholic community from gaining any advantage. Such a perception ignores the fact that some of the most progressive proposals to have emerged over recent years have come from Protestant working-class organisations.2

Many feel that the suffering inflicted upon, and often deliberately directed against, the Protestant community by the IRA has never been fully acknowledged. Nor have the social and economic needs of the Protestant working class been adequately addressed.

Ironically, despite the high profile and vociferousness of many Unionist politicians, a frequent complaint from the Protestant working class is a feeling of being ‘leaderless.’ These politicians might be staunch in defence of the Union, but in the opinion of many working-class Protestants, they show little willingness to lead their constituents anywhere beyond ‘Ulster Says No’ and into a new future.

THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY

One of the most traumatic consequences of the past twenty-five years upon the Protestant working class has been its crisis of identity. Despite the intensity of IRA violence, the Republican onslaught has not been the main cause of this crisis – after all, the IRA was always considered a ‘known’ enemy, suspected by many Protestants of waiting in the wings, ready to seize any opportunity to renew its habitual assault upon the Northern Ireland state. Instead, it is the British government which has been primarily responsible for the deep trauma within the Protestant psyche, for its actions have engendered an increasing sense of betrayal, which twenty-five years on had led to the almost total estrangement of Protestant Ulster3 from ‘mother’ England. Most working-class Loyalists now believe that their ‘loyalty’ counts for little on the mainland – Britain no longer wants them.

What exactly is it that Ulster Loyalists are ‘loyal’ to? And what is the identity so dearly held by Ulster’s Protestants? Ironically, the assertion made by their detractors that this identity is at best a ‘hybrid’ one or at worst a false consciousness fabricated by the ‘Brits,’ often seems to be confirmed by the confusion and uncertainty acknowledged by Protestants themselves.
We always loudly proclaimed that ‘we are the people.’ But just what ‘people’ are we – British, Irish, Northern Irish, Ulster-Costs? The young people I work with often only seem able to define themselves in opposition to others – they don’t know fully what they are, but they know exactly what they’re not!4

Some place the blame for this situation on the education system:

Our schools never made any serious attempt to help us understand our real heritage. Apart from 1690 and 1921, what did we ever learn about this history of our own homeland? We got plenty of English history drummed into us – but next to nothing about Ulster.

Such ‘avoidance’ by the schools was to leave most Protestants ill-prepared to counter what they considered to be the biased version of Ulster’s history invariably incorporated into every TV documentary on the ‘Troubles.’

We knew full well that the media were short-changing us when it came to presenting ‘our’ side of the story, but what was our side of the story? We couldn’t even explain it properly ourselves. And that’s still the same. There’s been plenty of times people around here have refused to take part in cross-community meetings, not because we don’t want to sit down with Catholics, but because we don’t have the self-confidence to do so. Few of us can articulate our case the way they can theirs.

‘They’ – the Catholic community – are often begrudgingly acknowledged to ‘know their history inside out’.

Let’s face it - the Republicans have really got their act together, especially their ‘Irish heritage’. It has given them a sense of purpose which has sustained them through times of adversity. They’ve done a thorough job of it, so fair play to them, that’s all I can say. But us? Oh no – we stumble from crisis to crisis, and even though we possess an equally legitimate heritage, at times it seems no bloody use to us. It’s high time we got our act together.

In substance, the Ulster Protestant heritage is an amalgamation of certain diverse strands: religious affiliation, a ‘British’ consciousness, an almost ‘ethnic’ sense of group identification, a genuinely-held sense of ‘belonging’ to Ulster, and, for the working class, the reality of their social and economic circumstances. Yet none of these strands by itself necessarily explains why Ulster’s Protestants should feel so ‘different’ from the rest of the island, and to some extent their sense of ‘difference’ has been partly reinforced because others also perceive them as ‘different.’
Religious affiliation need not necessarily have resulted in Protestantism being so seemingly incompatible to the concept of ‘Irishness.’ Indeed, Protestants have been at the forefront in the development of all things Irish, even the birth of Republicanism. Yet Daniel O’Connell, within five years of achieving Catholic Emancipation, stated that ‘Protestants were “foreigners” to us since they are of a different religion,’ and in more modern times, De Valera claimed that ‘since the coming of Saint Patrick ... Ireland has been a Christian and a Catholic nation ... She remains a Catholic nation.’ Somehow, the Protestants of Ireland ceased to figure in the ‘Irish’ consciousness, and their contribution to this island’s heritage was conveniently ignored.

Not that this has troubled many Protestants, for whom any such contribution made by their forefathers was an aberration, even traitorous.

I remember taking a group of Shankill Road teenagers to the old cemetery at the bottom of the Antrim Road, and I pointed out where the bones of Henry Joy McCracken are believed to have been interred. I told the young people that this was the grave of a famous Belfast Protestant hanged by the British. ‘What had he done?’ one asked, quite sympathetic in tone, for there was nothing unusual about Protestants finding themselves in conflict with the Crown. ‘He was one of the founders of Irish Republicanism,’ I replied. A look of complete disdain came over the teenager – ‘Served the bastard right, then!’

Many Protestants would feel in full accord with such ‘disdain.’

The Unionist Loyalist population have no wish to take any pride in Irish things, but rather should be urged and educated to take pride in Ulster things. Nevertheless, a growing number believe that this approach actually diminishes their Protestant heritage.

Witness the role and influence of radical Protestants in Ireland: Grattan’s parliament; the Volunteer Movement; Ulster Tenants Right; Linenhall Library; Athens of the North; Young Ireland (led by sons of the Presbyterian manse); Armour of Ballymoney; William Orr of Farranslane; James Orr of Ballycarry; Samuel Neilson of Belfast; Molly Ward’s Tavern; May Ann McCracken and the Charitable Institute; Volunteers’ Guard of Honour at the opening of the first Catholic Chapel in Belfast; industrial Ulster was built by radical Protestants (not by right wing sectarian demagogues); birth of historic Republicanism; the Irish language, music, and design was all kept alive by Protestant poets, musicians, and artists.

Of course, when we refer to ‘Protestants,’ we have to be mindful that, for many, an acceptance of this label has more to do with all the ingredients which make up their identity, not necessarily the practice of religion – and the dwindling attendance at many Protestant churches is testimony to that. Nevertheless, for a significant number of ‘Protestants,’ the religious component of
their identity is the fundamental one. Some insist that the continuing conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism in Ireland is historically inevitable:

The Pope is still the anti-Christ and all Protestants should be made aware of this. No apology is offered for this statement – it is backed up by biblical truth. The guiding hand of Rome is still with us. The Roman Catholic church supported the 1641 Protestant holocaust and gives it support to the slaughter of today – how many terrorists has it excommunicated? We have every reason to fear the Church of Rome, for if they had their way, we would be back in the Dark Ages.

However, many ‘religious’ Protestants feel that to portray Protestantism in such stark ‘conflict’ terms only serves to reinforce its image of being anti-Catholic, rather than non-Catholic. Protestantism, they feel, must be viewed in a much broader perspective.

The term ‘Protestant’ stems from the Latin ‘Protestant’ and ‘testari’ which means ‘to bear witness.’ It is not, therefore, a negative protest but a positive one. Protestantism is not necessarily anti-Catholic. Presbyterianism has protested against Anglican oppression; Congregationalism has protested against Presbyterian theocracy; non-subscribing Presbyterians have protested against Confessional Presbyterians. The process of socio-religious evolution has constantly defined and redefined the nature of Protestantism and, particularly in Ulster, it came to stand for religious and political dissent.

Others feel that the Northern Ireland conflict has tended to reduce their religion to a narrow stereotype, shown of its rich diversity.

I believe that there are certain important elements within our Protestant tradition which have been forgotten by many people. I grew up with a pride in the emphasis upon the right of private judgement, of the basic equality between all people, and a respect for truth, even when it might be considered inconvenient. My sense of being Protestant was not related to being part of any ascendancy. I feel that pettiness and sectarianism has undermined our Protestant heritage, as well as certain attitudes displayed by Protestant leaders towards Catholics. For example, for Protestants to profess a commitment to ‘civil and religious liberty for all,’ and then attempt to deny civil rights to others, as was done in 1969, is hypocritical. For me, the real Protestant tradition is open, tolerant, and accommodating.

Perhaps, the Civil Rights issue highlights the complexity of the matter. When ‘Protestant’ leaders opposed the Civil Rights marches, was it simply their Protestantism they felt was under threat, or the political system in which Protestants had invested all the diverse components that went to make up their heritage, in particular their sense of ‘Britishness?’

Many simplistic notions abound as to what it means for Ulster Protestants to feel ‘British,’ some often amusing:
Many years ago, I walked into a bookies to find two mates of mine arguing about whether Australia was or was not a British Dominion, and when I confirmed it was, one says to the other: 'I told you we owned Australia.' And him with the backside hanging out of his trousers, who must have 'owned' next to nothing!

Most working-class Protestants, however, would readily accept that being 'British' did not necessarily mean 'material' advantage – far from it – it was more the sense of pride they gained by being part of all those things which comprised 'Britishness' – democratic ideals, the great institutions, the culture, the English language, the world-wide renown and prestige, the Empire, the monarchy. Many of these components, from the perspective of today's world, might now be somewhat tarnished, but the idea of a 'British way of life' is still a positive concept to many people, whatever its critics might say. For Ulster’s Protestants in particular, all of these aspects of 'Britishness' are very real to them, and the cause of much pride. If one complements that with the numerous population movements between the two islands throughout our history, then the consolidation of a close relationship with mainland Britain would, in any ‘normal’ circumstances, only seem perfectly natural.

Indeed, some claim, with a deliberate irony, that the problem does not really lie with Ulster’s Protestants trying to convince themselves that they possess a British heritage, but with the rest of Ireland trying to pretend that they do not. What’s so wrong with being a part of ‘British’ history? Republicans continually harp on about 800 years of oppression, and if they want to remain fixated on that, that's up to them. But name me a world power that hasn't been guilty of oppression at one time or another. It hasn't all been negative. Whether Irish nationalists like it or not, the richness of Ireland’s heritage owes plenty to its ‘British’ connections, from the arrival of Saint Patrick to the contribution made to Irish literature by the great Anglo-Irish writers. Look, the day after Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa he announced he was re-applying for admission to the British Commonwealth. Now his people knew full well what it was like to suffer at the hands of white Europeans, Brits included, yet he still saw something valuable in renewing links with this unique 'British' family of peoples. People claim Ulster Protestants are narrow-minded. I think Irish nationalists are equally so. It is time they grew out of their hatred of everything ‘British’ and acknowledged all the positive things.

Even if Irish Republicans do not care to acknowledge these ‘hidden’ aspects of their own heritage, Protestants feel it is high time Republicans at least began to acknowledge something which is only too visible to everyone else:

Sooner or later the Republican movement has to accept that the real ‘British presence’ in Ireland is not the few thousand British soldiers here, but the one
million Protestants – and God knows how many Catholics – who feel they have a ‘British’ heritage.

However, the ‘bedrock’ of the heritage of Ulster Protestants is their deeply-held belief that they ‘belong’ here. They are as attached to their corner of the world as any people anywhere. Irish Nationalists often try to portray them as ‘interlopers’ who came over with the Plantation, the implication being that this Plantation occurred only ‘yesterday.’ Few would make such a claim against present-day Americans, and yet only two years separate the Plantation of Ulster and the first permanent British settlement in North America (Jamestown, Virginia). Nevertheless, such perceptions of Irish history remain a potent factor within the communal consciousness of today – whether Cromwell’s massacre of Catholics, or the 1641 massacre of Protestants. Some now feel that a stop must be made to this ‘history roundabout’ and a thorough reassessment begun.

It’s time we began to look more honestly at where we have come from and where we are going. It’s time we looked anew at Irish culture, British culture, Orangeism ... all of it ... everything. Without trying to belittle any of it. Let’s look at it with today’s needs in mind, not with a vengeful eye on the past. Prods have to get away from this notion that if you question anything you’re being disloyal. That’s nonsense.

While many Protestants might have some difficulty articulating the ingredients which make up their sense of ‘belonging to Ulster’, few observers could doubt its reality, particularly as exhibited by the working class.

A prominent Unionist political recently said – in private conversation – that, in the event of a United Ireland, he would simply leave. But we can’t just up and leave, that’s not an option for ordinary people. And anyway, we wouldn’t want to – this is our country and nobody’s gonna move us!

A somewhat narrower sense of ‘belonging’ within the Protestant working class is also evident in territorial rivalries – Upper Shankill v. Lower Shankill; Sandy Row v. The ‘Pass;’ West Belfast v. East Belfast; urban v. rural ... Family networks and community allegiances play an important part in Protestant working-class life, and the dismantling of old communities and the subsequent move to suburban estates has often compounded the demoralisation brought on by the Troubles.

THE WORKING-CLASS EXPERIENCE

Although the Protestant working class is seen by many to be the mainstay of Ulster Loyalism, a fundamental component of its own self-identity is undoubt-
edly the working-class experience. The cumulative legacy of working-class life through the generations has forged strong bonds within many local communities, supportive for many, claustrophobic perhaps for others. And while the ‘work ethic’ label often applied to the Protestant community is now being challenged, there is no doubt that, prior to the Troubles, people within the Protestant working class did work hard and believed it important to be industrious, for along with this came a sense of pride even amidst conditions of poverty.

The ‘work ethic’ label even had a cultural dimension, with the notion that the ‘Planters’ were an industrious stock of people who transformed the Ulster landscape, whereas the ‘natives’ were lazy. This had been translated in modern times into the perception that the Catholic community was quite content to live on welfare benefits while ‘doing the double,’ and that Catholic poverty was a reflection of their social and religious attitudes. One result of such perceptions was that a ‘blind eye’ could be turned towards genuine social injustices suffered by the Catholic community.

But what of the social injustices experienced by the Protestant working class? The reality of their daily lives left them little escape from the problems faced by working-class communities anywhere: poorer education, of having limited control over circumstances, a lack of confidence, and a squandering of talent. And, Nationalist propaganda notwithstanding, this deprivation was little ameliorated by their allegiance to the ruling Unionist establishment.

Republicans have long promoted the notion that the Protestant community was much better off than the Catholic community. This ‘half-myth’ retained its potency because Protestants even believed it themselves. The reality was that whatever privileges the Protestant working class was ‘granted’ were merely ‘crumbs from the table’ – it simply suited certain people to tell us that these ‘crumbs’ had to be held on to at all costs.

In the past, the dilemma for the Protestant working class was that to highlight social inequalities carried political risk. It was believed that any criticism of government policies would be detrimental to the Northern Ireland state and simply play into the hands of Republicans. The Unionist establishment expertly avoided any need to tackle inequality by playing on this fear. That social inequalities were nevertheless very real to ordinary Protestants is revealed by how few now shed tears for the old Stormont.

There was a terrible feeling of betrayal when Stormont was swept aside, but now that it has gone it is time working-class Prods admitted that, other than the mistaken notion that it was somehow defending our ‘interests,’ we got precious little from it – our lives were hardly a bed of roses. If a devolved administration ever returns we must make it perfectly clear that we don’t want one like the old one – that would be totally unacceptable.

The present Troubles have released many dormant frustrations:
Our Unionist politicians and church leaders never showed the slightest concern for the 'benefit rights' of ordinary Prods. Even at the beginning of the 'Troubles,' the only ones offering welfare advice to working-class people were a few Catholic priests -- and I know, because I had to go to one of them.

While in Great Britain such social needs might have resulted in a sizeable 'labour' vote, in Northern Ireland the stance taken by the British Labour Party to a United Ireland has seriously undermined whatever appeal a labour party might have among working-class Protestants. Despite the existence of independent labour candidates, the mood at present is still largely to support the main Unionist parties -- but not as unconditionally as before.

All a Unionist candidate had to do was appear at a street-corner, wave the Union Jack, shout 'This we will maintain', and he was as good as elected. Those days have to be brought to an end. It's time we called our politicians to account for failing to address our real needs.

Although many voices within the Protestant working class are becoming increasingly vociferous in such demands, the task facing them is immense. For the Protestant working class has been demoralised on two fronts simultaneously. The Troubles -- which forced Protestants into cultural and political 'retreat' -- have coincided with the massive erosion of the industrial base which had provided them with their economic security. Put simply, many of the Protestant working class are no longer 'working' class.

The demoralisation this has engendered is very real, for much communal and individual 'worth' accrued to industrial skills, even to the detriment of other avenues of advancement. Further education, for example, was seen as a second-best option to getting into a trade, and attitudes to education are still highly ambivalent. In the past, children who could have gone on to secondary education often did not do so simply because their parents could not afford the uniform; nowadays, the same talented children miss out on higher education opportunities as much because the social conditioning of their parents' attitudes has prevented such opportunities being viewed positively. The current scarcity of job opportunities, coupled with the poor achievement record of many schools in Protestant working-class areas, means that working-class youth are badly losing out on both fronts.

The loss of a working-class identity is the 'hidden' component of the present crisis, and inevitably has a bearing on political perceptions.

The IRA have been targeting economic targets here for years, but they haven't done as good a job as Thatcher and her cronies did across the water. Where is Britain's industrial might now, which we are all so proud to be a
We know that the British don't care tuppence for us, but sure they don't even care about their own people – half of England has become an industrial wasteland. When I watch the Tories on the box, I ask myself – do I really want to be loyal to yon crowd?

The opinion of many within the Protestant working class is that the adverse socio-economic circumstances confronting them have been ignored by everyone (except when it suits – the Protestant middle class, the media, the government, the politicians). The remarkable growth of community organisations over the past twenty-five years is a sign that ordinary people realise they have to confront their social and economic circumstances themselves. Nevertheless, the balance of power is heavily weighed against them. And although the decision-making processes are remote from working-class hands, Catholic as much as Protestant, present antagonisms blur such a realisation:

We get nothing for our areas, all the bloody grants to the Catholics. One moan from them and they get whatever they want!

Community workers see the inherent dangers in such a perception.

We need to stop comparing the two working-class communities in this way. Perhaps rather than talk of either side being preferentially discriminated against, we should talk of both communities being equally disadvantaged as working class. Take the 'equal opportunities' issue. I accept that to allocate jobs on the basis of religion is wrong, but I would imagine that there are far more job opportunities denied to ordinary working-class people simply because their home address contains the word ‘Shankill’ or ‘Falls.’ To concentrate on religious or sex discrimination is to ignore another, far more fundamental inequality.

There is no doubt that the political situation and the economic downturn are combining to reinforce the demoralisation and lack of self-esteem that is growing daily within the Protestant working class, and augurs ill for the future.

THE IMPACT OF THE ‘TROUBLES’

The Troubles have had a profound impact upon both working classes, not the least because the death and destruction which has ensued has disproportionately affected their communities. Within the Protestant community, opinion about the root causes is still mixed:

The biggest mistake the Prods made was not to join in the Civil Rights marches. And even though we didn’t, we shouldn’t have tried to justify malpractices. We must accept that we were more than aware of the abuses
of power which went on in the past; they might not have been done by us, but they were supposedly done for us, and we were only too prepared to keep quiet about them. It was inevitable that some sort of crisis would erupt – whether we like to admit it or not, Northern Ireland was a sick society.

Others remain far more cynical:

People imagine that Civil Rights was all about reform. Nobody should be fooled by that. Nationalists and Republicans don’t want to reform Northern Ireland, they want to destroy it! We could be the most progressive state in the world and the IRA would still be trying to bomb us out of existence.

Even those who accept that there were legitimate grievances feel deeply embittered at how the situation progressed:

Okay, we stupidly fought the Civil Rights people every inch of the way, but their demands were eventually all met – they got everything they asked for. If Catholics had been prepared to take one step at a time, we would have had to reach some accommodation with them, but no, nothing was ever good enough, and their insatiable demands and the ‘all or nothing’ of the IRA has just bred a deep resentment and anger.

There is now widespread cynicism about Nationalist and Republican motivations:

It’s a bloody laugh to suggest Republicans ever gave a damn about civil rights! They followed a policy of non-participation then accused the state of not including them. They always asked for more than could be given, then accused the state of discriminating against them. They used their ‘nationality’ as a reason to murder but accused the state of being bigoted and sectarian. They spread half-truths all over the world about the state they profess to hate, while willingly accepting all its monetary benefits. Despite claiming to be fighting for ‘democracy,’ all their gains have been made by using bombs, guns, murder, and terror – not by any sound political policies. But it has all been counter-productive. For I’ll tell you what they have done – in their obsession with destroying a single ‘geographical’ border, the IRA have succeeded in creating a thousand more borders in the minds of our people.

However, whatever the differing perceptions about the Civil Rights question, twenty-five years on they seemingly bear little relation to the motivations of today.
We have a whole new generation queuing up to join the paramilitaries. They haven't a notion how it all started, and most of them couldn't care less. Civil Rights is ancient history to them. They just see a hated enemy out to destroy them and they want to fight back. I agree with them – whatever those wrongs were, they don't justify all the IRA killings.

The legacy of over 3,000 deaths has also added its own stark reality to our two communities, which, for those who have suffered, transcends whatever history had gone before.

My father was murdered twenty-four years ago by the IRA. He was not a member of the security forces, nor did he work for them, nor was he in any paramilitary organisation. He was a labourer at the coal quay, whose only concern was to support his family – a wife, four children, and a baby on the way. He was an 'ordinary Protestant,' presumably one of those 'ordinary Protestants' Gerry Adams tells us have nothing to fear. Yet, the IRA left him bleeding to death in the street. In destroying our family, Sinn Fein/IRA taught me all I need to know about their 'peace process.'

When, at the beginning of the Troubles, the Protestant working class felt the full weight of British army heavy-handedness, few in the Protestant establishment wanted to acknowledge what was happening. It was only those at the receiving end, especially those sent to prison, who began, for the first time, to experience the British Army the same way Republicans had always done. Yet, the testimony of these Loyalists was frequently ignored or played down by Unionist politicians:

The army grabbed me one day and split my head wide open. They left me lying at the side of the road – probably thought I was dead. Yet when I tried to get our local politicians to hold a press conference, they squirmed away from such an idea – it would only help Republican propaganda, they said.

The Troubles have also profoundly affected the relationship between the Protestant working class and the police. Admittedly, the fact that Protestants once felt that the police were 'their' police was just the reverse side of the coin by which the Catholic community felt they were definitely not theirs. However, in their efforts to become more 'professional' and 'acceptable' to the two communities, the police have, in reality, become ever more distant from both working classes. The police increasingly live in their own enclaves away from working-class areas, and often view working-class citizens as (in their own words) 'peasants' or 'them.' One aspect of this is the increased harassment
displayed towards working-class youth with the resultant diminution in community respect.

Some negative aspects of the past 25 years are a consequence of international trends rather than anything uniquely local – the increase in vandalism, youth alienation, drug abuse, family breakdown, and sexual abuse, as well as the decrease in respect shown to the elderly. While it is possible that some of these things may formerly have been largely hidden, there nevertheless remains the strong conviction that the Troubles have accelerated the process through which positive community values have greatly suffered.

THE PROBLEM OF SECTARIANISM

Sectarianism is the single most destructive element associated with the Protestant community, not only because of the damage it does to the image of that community in the eyes of outsiders, but because of the more insidious damage it causes within. Yet, while many Protestants undoubtedly harbour sectarian feelings, some of them extremely bitter, there is a growing number who acknowledge that such feelings are unacceptable.

Sectarianism, in its most innocuous dictionary meaning, simply denotes ‘adherence to a particular sect.’ The Protestant emphasis on individual choice has amply manifested itself in Northern Ireland, with a plethora of competing ‘sects’ and churches. Even in the Greater Shankill area there are twenty-three different denominations.

Is it any wonder that Prods cannot speak with one voice? I tried to get the churches on the Shankill to co-operate on a community festival, and gave up in frustration. There were too many personalities, too many competing interests, and I was left feeling they really had no heart in working together.

Even in class terms, Protestant churches can be discriminating:

Many of the mission halls and small churches sprang up to answer the needs of ordinary people – those who hadn’t the ‘proper’ clothes, or who lacked the ‘proper’ social graces to be welcomed into the big Protestant churches, dominated by middle-class attitudes. The fact that so many missions were able to build their own churches shows that there is considerable talent in our midst.

The nature of Fundamentalist Protestantism has not only made it difficult to forge a sense of inclusiveness within the Protestant community, but prohibited any real link with the Catholic community, even on non-religious issues. And more significantly, Protestant assertiveness has often been translated into aggressiveness, with Catholics and Catholicism its target, and sectarianism – in its more sinister dictionary meaning – its vehicle.
The sectarianism inherent in the Northern Ireland state was highlighted world-wide when the Troubles erupted, and because working-class Protestants so vociferously opposed the Civil Rights cause, they were seen by most outsiders as willing accomplices in the state’s sectarianism. Some now feel that it is time to challenge such an assumption.

Okay, we turned a blind eye to what was going on, we can’t deny that. But what was going on wasn’t within our control, the working class never had much power within the Unionist Party, nor were they ever encouraged to have any. It was men supposedly far more educated than us who created sectarian institutions. Why should we take all the blame? The Catholic community must realise that we would have had as much difficulty challenging the system as they would have had. And those con-men are still at it … a top Unionist politician recently said that ordinary people shouldn’t be getting involved in politics – politics should be left in ‘their’ hands. In their hands! After the bloody mess they’ve made!

Because of the ‘mess’ that was made – by whoever made it – the Protestant community, forced onto the defensive by the IRA onslaught, witnessed the rapid growth of paramilitary organisations, some members of which have been involved in an ongoing programme of retribution against the Catholic community. So horrendous have been some of their killings that commentators often portray the perpetrators as psychopaths, warped individuals unrepresentative of anyone but themselves. However, even those in the Protestant working class who abhor the killings acknowledge that such an interpretation would be grossly misleading.

We mustn’t try to pretend that Loyalist paramilitaries are people who just dropped from the sky … somehow quite different from the rest of us. They are part and parcel of our community – just as Republican paramilitaries are part and parcel of the Catholic community. Many are ordinary young men who feel they have been left with no choice but to fight back – the same young men who generations ago would have gone to their deaths in the trenches and been hailed as heroes. It’s no use demonising them – we need to understand the circumstances which created them.

Those circumstances, in the eyes of the Protestant working class, included not only the relentless IRA violence but the unpalatable realisation that this violence was actually reaping rewards. As government repeatedly retreated in the face of IRA pressure, the Protestant paramilitary organisations took the view that ‘if terror can work for them, it can work for us’.

No matter how much we might detest the nature of Loyalist killings, we cannot escape the fact that without the constant threat of Loyalist violence,
we’d have been sold out long ago. We now know that during the ceasefire of ’72, the IRA were secretly promised more than was publicly admitted. Loyalist paramilitary leaders got a message to government to say that, if the democratic wishes of the majority community were ignored, then not only would Loyalist paramilitaries strike back in ‘predictable’ ways but also in completely ‘unpredictable’ ways. I believe that it was this threat which prevented the British government from selling us out back then.

In the present state of crisis confronting the Protestant community, an increasing number of ordinary people are prepared to tolerate Loyalist paramilitary actions, as much out of a sense of desperation.

Who else is defending the Protestant community? The Unionists would have caved in a long time ago, the police will feed at the hand of whoever pays them – but the Loyalist paramilitaries will never allow us to be sold down the river.

Nevertheless, many others believe that, by the very methods they use in their ‘defence,’ Ulster’s Protestants are hastening the day of complete isolation. And even more importantly, these ‘methods’ are felt to be utterly immoral.

It’s just evil, pure evil. Don’t let’s pretend there’s any other word for it. These people have no right to take human life. No excuse can ever justify all this killing – and I mean on both sides. And it’s not just the bereaved families who are suffering – it’s all of us. The violence is slowly destroying our communities from within – the behaviour of the young people around here terrifies me more than any Catholics ever could.

Many Protestants believe that the most insidious aspect of the propaganda battle which the IRA has been allowed to win is the notion that their armed struggle is strictly non-sectarian.

It’s time everyone was honest about this. The IRA have carried out plenty of purely sectarian killings, including some blatantly sectarian pub bombings, not to mention deliberately picking ‘Protestant’ towns for their biggest bombs, or targeting our housing estates. We’re sick of their hypocrisy. The rest of the world might be fooled, but we’re not.

Some go further and claim that not only has the IRA campaign taken on the attributes of sectarianism, but it was always inherently anti-Protestant:

To say that the conflict in Northern Ireland is not a religious one is an insult to the Protestant people who have been butchered for their religious beliefs for centuries. The ‘ethnic cleansing’ the IRA has been carrying out all along
the border region is part and parcel of the same age-old anti-Protestantism. Outsiders imagine the IRA is fighting a ‘modern’ war – not a bit of it, this is just the 1641 massacres all over again.

Whatever its motivation, IRA violence is seen by many Protestants as a primary cause of their own sectarianism.

Before the Troubles I can honestly say that I felt no animosity towards Catholics. Live and let live. But over the years as I’ve watched families suffer – including my own – all I’ve felt is bitterness. With each IRA atrocity, I just feel more and more hatred towards the entire Catholic community.

Certainly the IRA is viewed as more than adept at manipulating this sectarianism to suit its own purposes.

The IRA are quite happy if Prods are sectarian – it fits their propaganda perfectly. They prefer the world to see Prods as bigots and them as defenders of oppressed Catholics. And when someone on our side takes a risk and tries to reach out to the other community – like Ray Smallwoods\(^\text{10}\) when he met with those Catholic priests – the IRA step in to prevent it. The IRA will make sure that Prods like Ray who are prepared to sit down with ordinary Catholics never get a chance to do so. They’re afraid Catholics might get the ‘wrong’ impression!

Working-class Protestants also resent middle-class Protestants who point the finger at them when the charge of sectarianism is levelled at the Protestant community.

Many of these so-called ‘moderates’ are bloody hypocrites! They pretend not to be bigoted in case it affects their careers, but they’re as bad as the next. Probably even more than working-class Prods, for people round here are not all as bigoted as everyone makes out. You take the response of ordinary people to the Shankill bombing. Okay there was real anger, and some talked of revenge, but there were just as many who realised – and said so out loud – that both communities were suffering, and that we all had to find a different way forward.

It was generally accepted that the question of ‘sectarianism’ had to be honestly confronted and while there should be an open acknowledgement that Protestants have been guilty of sectarianism, a deeper assessment had to be made of the circumstances which have led to this, for it is not unique to either ‘side.’ Indeed, recent contacts with members of the Catholic community have revealed that a growing sense of triumphalism, imbued with sectarian feeling, is manifesting itself within that community.
The label of ‘sectarianism’ has also had a profoundly negative effect within the Protestant working class, for many ordinary Protestants feel increasingly demoralised not only by the criticisms levelled at them by outsiders, but by the actions of Protestants which serve to confirm such criticisms. Yet, while admitting that such actions reinforce the negative label, they believe it is totally unfair for the whole of the Protestant working class to be demonised as bigots.

Only when sectarianism is brought to the surface and fully analysed can there be any hope of eradicating it. The entire Protestant working class must define what it is as a community, good aspects and bad. Only then can more positive labels begin to gain any credibility.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

Some of those involved in community work over the years now believe that a concentration on localised socio-economic issues is manifestly inadequate – the entire Protestant working class is facing a crisis which must be addressed in its totality. That community is now felt to be in ‘retreat’ on many ‘fronts’ simultaneously – economically, politically, culturally, even psychologically.

On the economic front, the Protestant working-class has suffered greatly from the effects of recession. That this recession is unrelated to the Troubles hardly matters anymore – for the narrow-minded it has become just another element for which a scapegoat must be found. For community activists, it is just another brick in a wall that seems to be insurmountable.

On the political front, the Protestant working class feels increasingly isolated by its enemies and betrayed by its friends. All shades of nationalist opinion have now openly joined forces to either coerce or gradually pry the Protestant community away from its ‘Britishness.’ And the ‘British’ on the mainland never really cared that much anyway.

If the British government really believed we were an integral part of the UK do you think it would have allowed its citizens to have suffered this state of terror for so long. Can you imagine it being tolerated anywhere in England - not a chance! And tell me any other part of the UK where the British government would meekly accept that flying the Union Jack – the national flag, after all – can be considered offensive!

Working-class Protestants watch in bewilderment the response of government and media to each successive nuance in the politics of Sinn Fein, including the current ‘Hume-Adams Peace Process.’

How come everyone has fallen for all this crap – any fool can see that their ‘peace process’ is merely a new tactic, a ‘piece by piece’ process. The IRA don’t want peace – they want victory and surrender.
This gulf in perception between Loyalists and Republicans is not one-sided. In the opinion of Protestant community workers the Republican movement is still, despite twenty-five years of opportunity, depressingly incapable of anything more than a stereotypical understanding of the Protestant working class. A former Republican prisoner recently dismissed a Channel 4 documentary on the Shankill community by saying to its producer: ‘That wasn’t the real Shankill. The ‘Butchers’ ... that’s the real Shankill.’

The Republican movement have done absolutely nothing to reach out to the Protestant working class, absolutely nothing. They’re fixated with the ‘Brits’ – they’ve a desperate need to talk to them ... but not to us, they avoid us like the plague. They probably realise they can’t fool us the way they do everyone else – we can see right through their phony rhetoric, see them for what they really are.

Most Protestants do not believe that Republicans have any real desire to engage their community in genuine dialogue.

They’ve made it perfectly clear they have no time for us. When a leading Sinn Fein spokesman was asked his opinion of the policies of the working-class Progressive Unionist Party, he retorted: ‘Progressive’ Unionists? You might as well talk of ‘progressive’ Fascists!

Some of the current Sinn Fein demands only meet with derision among Protestants:

It’s pathetic the way Republicans are demanding that the British should become ‘persuaders’ in getting the Prods into a United Ireland. Can you believe it! They need the hated ‘Brits’ to do it because they know they haven’t a ‘snowball’s chance in hell’ of doin’ it themselves! Why don’t Republicans come out and admit that it’s not the Prods who have a ‘problem’ with their identity, it’s the Republican movement who have the problem – they just cannot accept that one million people living on this island genuinely consider themselves British!

To the Protestant working class, the Republican movement’s present position of being in the ascendant has not been accompanied by any preparedness to be generous and accommodating – which has often been the case in other conflict areas around the world – but has simply reinforced the Nationalist community’s triumphalism and latent sectarianism. Given such perceptions, whether accurate or not, any talk of accommodation raises deep fears.

Are Ulster’s enemies seeking accommodation with us? Are Nationalists or Republicans asking to sit down with the Protestant community and address
their fears? Not a bit of it. This kind of thinking only increases the demoralisation of the Protestant community. We have been betrayed by our government and walked upon by our politicians, and now we are being demoralised by this type of thinking, for it doesn't get us anywhere. Whatever you come up with, the Nationalist community will reject it as not enough - so you just help destroy whatever confidence remains within the Protestant community.

Ironically, a growing number feel that the only way now to protect the Protestant community is to end its reliance on the 'Union' and look to themselves - an Ulster Protestant version of Sinn Fein:

Our enemies have never had any interest in us - it is time we began thinking of ourselves first. Give the government notice that they either accept and embrace Ulster's loyalty or get out and leave us alone to determine our own future.

The voices who would 'go it alone' fall into two camps: those who call for an Independent Ulster, the structure of which they acknowledge would be little more than a 'Protestant homeland,' and those who would wish to create a completely new society to which both communities could give allegiance. The former believe that the latter are out of touch with reality:

You cannot reconcile the irreconcilable. For even if there weren't different loyalties, after twenty-five years of killing there's no way that our two communities could ever trust each other again. When all these do-gooders and clergy harp on about compromise and accommodation, let them spell out exactly what it is they expect us all to agree to. I think you'll find that, aside from fine-sounding words, there'll be precious little even they will be prepared to compromise on. It's time we accepted that we have little or nothing in common.

Those who believe in a 'new' Ulster, however, respond that both communities have gone through so much together, and become so estranged from their respective 'friends' in London and Dublin, that they have enough in common to make it work.

I think all this talk of a 'Protestant homeland' is essentially defeatist. Rather than 'protect' the Protestant community I think such an eventuality would actually endanger it. I often wonder whether people who talk of an Independent Ulster see it as the 'best option' or the 'last resort.' To me, the only effective way to 'save' Ulster - or even the Union - is to change it for the better, and make it an attractive proposition for both communities. Let's
be honest, Britain doesn’t want us, and Dublin would panic if they thought
reunification was just around the corner.

While some within the Protestant working class desperately hope for a sign that
the gun could be taken out of politics and real dialogue allowed to emerge – no
matter how painful – they despair that such a scenario plays any part in the
consciousness of the Republican movement:

The Protestant community has little left to give up – except its identity. And
it looks increasingly that that’s exactly what the Nationalist community are
waiting for, that’s all that will satisfy them.

On the cultural front, attitudes are equally diverse. Many want to ‘close ranks’
as if somehow the rekindling of a ‘pure’ identity will provide some semblance
of communal security:

We should declare ourselves ‘proud to be Prod,’ and cease all this flirting
with ‘Irishness.’ The Ulster people have nothing to do with the Irish, and I
cringe every time I hear a Prod say that the Gaelic language is ours as well.
It has nothing to do with us!

However, others feel that such voices are simply adding their number to those
English chauvinists and Irish nationalists who, for so long, have denied the
Protestant community their rightful heritage.

We must reclaim our real heritage, and if we find it is also an ‘Irish’ heritage,
we must have the courage to say so, just as we would hope the Catholic
community would have the courage to admit to the ‘British’ part of their
heritage. From some of the material coming out recently, it is quite evident
that both communities have long had a ‘shared’ heritage. Why can’t we build
on that one?

What is the balance sheet of all the conflicting needs, fears, and aspirations held
by the Protestant working class? Readers hoping for a definitive answer to that
question will be disappointed, for it is evident that the Protestant working class
contains a great diversity of opinion, a diversity that might surprise even its
detractors. Indeed, the very existence of such a diversity of opinion within the
Protestant community is itself an answer to all those media commentators who
previously judged the Protestant working class to be a monolithic mass,
reactionary in outlook, and incapable of serious reflection.

While most Protestants, often with good reason, believe that the ‘outside
world’ is fundamentally hostile to their cause and only too willing to portray
their community on the basis of worn-out stereotypes – after all, every good
drama needs its 'baddies' – many now readily admit that their negative image is as much their own fault. Over the years, there has been a marked inability by their political leaders to adequately present the Unionist 'case,' coupled with the defensive and aggressive attitude the Protestant working class has displayed towards the media.

It's still goin' on. I was up the Shankill the other day and this wee woman was shoutin' at a crew filming what was left of Frizzell's. I calmed her down and said 'Look love, we shouldn't have been chasin' these people all these years, we should have been invitin' them in!'

All that can be said with any certainty is that an energetic reassessment is presently underway within the Protestant working class, except of course among those already so demoralised that they have ceased doubting their eventual fate. Much of that energy is being channelled into plans for resistance, and no-one should be under the misapprehension that the Protestant working class will permit itself to be docilely led into an unacceptable future. But others are directing their energies into a radical reappraisal of where they have come from and where they are going.

Before the Troubles we were 'confidently dependent.' It is now time to grow up to adulthood. We must challenge all we took for granted, just as we ask the Catholic community to challenge its own 'certainties.' Both communities must put the Plantation and 1641 behind them for ever. We must face the realities of the present, assess all our relationships, and build for the future. The Protestant community must also confront its highly sectarian image – we are not seeking exoneration, but explanation.

There is also widespread admission of the wrong both communities have done each other:

Protestant and Catholic suffering is equally heart-breaking. There are no innocent parties to the Northern Ireland conflict. To claim innocence is to be hypocritical – and Loyalists and Republicans have been hypocritical enough.

There are even those voices – few in number, no doubt – who dare to pose previously unthinkable questions:

I feel that the real threat to our continued existence as a people comes not from Republicanism but from our own insecurity and resistance to change. For too long, we have linked our survival as a people to Britain, the Union, Orangeism ... But if, at the end of the day, these things fail us, does that mean we are finished as a people? Surely the Protestant people of Ulster have more character, are made of stronger mettle than that? We must look to the future
and carve out a new role for ourselves. We must create a new vision. If we collapse like lost children once ‘mother’ England lets go our hand, then all the claims made by Irish nationalists that we never possessed a ‘real’ identity to start with will only have been proven correct.

Members of the Protestant working class are neither all irredeemable bigots nor dormant progressives. Perhaps, in their diversity, once seen as their greatest weakness, lies their greatest strength, for it will be the preparedness to look at a diversity of options which could enable both communities to move forward into the future. Ironically, both those within the Protestant working class who are preparing to ‘resist’ any further surrender, and those who wish to create a new vision for the future, voice an identical perception:

Whatever happens we will take responsibility for our own destiny.

IRA CEASEFIRE POSTSCRIPT

Although the media, in its inimitable fashion, had been hyping up the likelihood of an IRA ceasefire for some time – ably abetted by leaks from Republican sources – the Protestant working class was as ill-prepared for the announcement, when it came, as any other section of the population. To many ordinary Protestants, the ceasefire engendered deep suspicion, for there was genuine disbelief that the IRA would have relinquished its ‘armed struggle’ without having received assurances that its ultimate goal of a United Ireland was to be made reality by other means. And yet, as with the rest of the population, most ordinary Protestants genuinely wanted to believe that real peace was now possible.

A poll carried out for the Shankill People five days after the ceasefire announcement highlighted this seemingly contradictory mixture of hope, suspicion, and pessimism. ‘Hope’ was indicated by the 72% of those questioned who welcomed the IRA’s announcement. ‘Suspicion’ was indicated by the 55% who felt the British government had ‘sold out’ to the IRA. And ‘pessimism’ was indicated by the 70% who felt the ceasefire would not last, although 61% desired that Loyalist paramilitaries should nevertheless call their own ceasefire.

This juxtaposition of hopes and fears should not come as any great surprise, for ordinary people on the Shankill Road have had their emotions buffeted for twenty-five years and their trust and hope repeatedly betrayed. Yet despite this, perhaps what might surprise outside commentators is not only the overwhelming desire for peace the survey revealed, but the willingness among the residents of the Shankill for their own community to respond in a positive fashion.

The ceasefire has highlighted the full range of emotions and perceptions contained with the Protestant working class. One such perception is that it is
almost too soon, not only to assess whether there is now a genuine opportunity for peace, but to act upon that opportunity in the immediate term.

Both communities need space to grieve. There is so much hurt and pain around that for some it will be many years before they can come to terms with their personal loss, if ever. Others might be willing to begin to work towards some accommodation now, but people must realise that twenty-five years of suffering cannot be brushed aside just like that. Time will be needed for wounds to heal. Indeed, some feel that their own personal wounds are too deep to ever heal:

Right at the beginning of the Troubles my family had to endure unbelievable harassment because we owned a number of shops in Catholic areas — a business my father had built up by hard graft. Republicans tried to drive us out by verbal and physical assaults — on my mother, my brother, and on myself — I still bear the scars to this day. Finally, when that didn’t work they brutally attacked my father, and our family had to sit agonising for two weeks by his hospital bedside before he died. Not only were we all completely devastated, but I was robbed of my teenage years, and it is only recently that I have been coming to terms with what I have lost. Yet, when I was interviewed the other day by the media — just after the ceasefire — and said that I was still filled with hatred, they told me: ‘Oh, we couldn’t use that.’ So it seems I am not even allowed to give voice to the reality of what the IRA has done to me, in case it upsets those who now desire to parade apologies for gunmen as ‘peace-makers.’ It makes me sick.

To those who have been the direct victims of IRA violence, recent post-ceasefire appeals by leading Republican spokesmen to their ‘Protestant brothers and sisters’ have been received not just with astonishment, but deep anger.

Who do they think they are — or more to the point, who do they think we are! Just because it now suits their new image, as they parade their cause on the world stage, to talk of us as their ‘brothers,’ we’re supposed to forget that, before the ceasefire, they spoke of us with utter contempt. And Adams had the cheek to say of Michael Mates: ‘if this man is genuinely seeking consent, why isn’t he out there seeking consent, negotiating consent?’ I haven’t seen much of Adams and company ‘out there seeking consent’ over the past twenty-five years!

Many others whose families have not suffered directly at the hands of the IRA still harbour a deep distrust:

How can we believe that they have given up the gun when all their guns are not only still there, but are being moved to safer locations? I don’t accept for one minute that this ceasefire is meant to be permanent. This is just the IRA’s latest tactic.
Others take a more pragmatic approach:

I don’t think the IRA can ever say their ceasefire is ‘permanent.’ And even if they did, what difference would it make? All it would take would be for a breakaway group to disown the leadership and it could start up all over again. No, I don’t believe it is permanent – but I do believe that, if both communities put the proper effort into it, we could make it permanent.

Some within the Protestant working class feel that, while the ceasefire has not necessarily created a totally new situation, it has nevertheless opened up new possibilities, which must not be thrown away.

Okay, let’s accept that the IRA ceasefire is simply a new tactic. So what? Isn’t it a much more acceptable tactic than killing? During any period that the Republicans take violence out of the equation, they can only move forward in three ways. By using political means – and this will include harnessing all their Irish and American supporters. Or by a return to street politics. Or by persuasion – though they haven’t spent much time practising for that. Why should we fear any of these alternatives? We should feel strong enough in our own position to say: okay, we accept your challenge, we’ll argue our case with you point by point. For I really believe that, in the end, we will win the argument.

Despite all the factors which have added to the demoralisation and isolation experienced by the Protestant working class over the last twenty-five years, there are signs that some sections within that community have grown in self-confidence and found a new ability to articulate not only the needs of their own community, but their vision for the whole of Northern Ireland. They also feel that it is time the Protestant working class developed its own response to the present situation.

We can’t afford to let our politicians destroy whatever opportunities might be created. Let’s face it, many of our politicians must be frightened by the ceasefire. And it’s not hard to see why – if our fears about being sold out are finally allayed, in a few years from now these politicians could be redundant. We must analyse the situation from our own needs, not theirs. We already know that those needs are not always the same. We’ve been marched up to the top of the hill and down again once too often.

Some take reassurance from the fact that, despite twenty-five years of terrorism, the ‘British’ people of Ulster still remain British and that – unless some secret deal has indeed been done, despite all the assurances – it is the IRA’s ‘armed struggle’ which has had to confront harsh reality.
Are the IRA any closer to their goal after all their efforts? No. Not only that, but they have shaken the political establishment in the South out of their old Republican shibboleths and forced every brand of constitutional nationalism to openly declare that consent, not violence, is now the only acceptable solution to the 'Irish question.' The IRA have scored a massive 'own-goal.' Their methods have finally led the rest of Ireland to view the 'physical force' tradition as a hindrance to this island's future.

If the ceasefire has indeed resulted from Sinn Fein and the IRA finally facing up to political reality, there is the belief among some Protestants that how their community responds will be of vital importance for the way the situation now develops.

Even though the IRA terror campaign has been defeated, not by the British Army or the RUC, but by the endurance of the ordinary people of Ulster, it is no time for triumphalism. The indefinite postponement of a United Ireland, aggravated by Protestant triumphalism, could quickly lead to massive disillusionment among ordinary Catholics. It is up to us to move the situation forward before that happens. We must show the Catholic community that even though they might feel betrayed, both communities are no longer ‘back to square one.’ Both communities have moved, for there is no denying that the Troubles have acted as a very painful catalyst.

While many Protestants are still intensely suspicious of the Catholic community, and just as many remain deeply embittered by all that has transpired during the past twenty-five years, others feel that the moment has arrived to transform the situation radically.

Both communities have suffered and both communities have caused that suffering. We cannot undo the past, but we can rebuild for the future. If Republicans are prepared to use democratic means to try and ‘persuade’ us to go into a United Ireland, well, let them go ahead and do that. Our task will be to ‘persuade’ Catholics that the Union is the best option for them. To be honest, I believe that if we really put our minds to it, it is we who would have the easier task. But it will mean Protestants having the courage to sit down with the Catholic community and change Ulster so that it reflects the identities of all its people. That will mean the Catholic community feeling able to give proper expression to its sense of Irishness alongside our sense of Britishness. I don’t see why a new Northern Ireland could not incorporate both.

OCTOBER 1994

On 13 October 1994, a few days before this [essay was first published], the Combined Loyalist Military Command announced that all Loyalist paramili-
tary organisations were declaring a ceasefire. The ceasefire statement, which called for all ‘battles’ in future to be solely ‘political’ ones, also said: ‘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.’

ENDNOTES

1 Life on the Interface, Island Pamphlets No 1.
3 Loyalist use of the term ‘Ulster’ to describe Northern Ireland is anathema to most Irish nationalists, who prefer to call this ‘British invention’ the ‘Six Counties,’ in recognition of the three remaining Ulster counties incorporated into the Republic of Ireland. Ironically, the 9-county configuration staunch nationalists deem to be ‘historic Ulster’ – and which includes Donegal, Monaghan, and Cavan – is itself a ‘British invention.’ For even up to the Anglo-Irish and Gaelic lordships of the early 16th century, ‘Ulster’ contained territory presently in Co Louth rather than Co Cavan, and it was Queen Elizabeth’s administrators who subsequently redefined the province’s boundaries. See A New History of Ireland, ed. Moody, Martin and Byrne, vol. IX: ‘Maps, Genealogies, Lists’, map 47, Oxford, 1984.
4 The quotes throughout this document come from three sources: opinions expressed during the main discussions; outside comments made to members of the discussion group and relayed back; and, finally, the various documents which were submitted to the group.
5 Parl. Deb. III, xv, 325; Piolot 13-i, 1834.
6 Radio broadcast, St Patrick’s Day, 1935.
7 The workforce at Belfast Shipyard, for example, has plummeted from its peak of 42,000 to just 2,000; Mackies Engineering Foundry has dropped from 7,500 to 390. Many major outside companies with local plants have since departed Northern Ireland – I.C.I., Courtaulds, British Enkalon, G.E.C., Goodyear, Michelen. The collapse of the linen industry saw the closure of numerous mills. Decline or near demise has hit other major employing sectors – Gallaghers, the Ropeworks, the stevedores at the docks … Small businesses in the Greater Shankill area, once numbering over 600 before redevelopment, now only total 127.
8 In 1986/87 in the Greater Shankill area, only 4% of primary school children passed the ‘11 plus’ examination, when the Northern Ireland average was 21%. In 1987/88, the total of children in the Greater Shankill area who passed was 11; in 1988/89 it was 13. In 1992 37% of secondary school children did not gain any GCSEs. In 1992 no secondary school pupils went on to Higher Education from Greater Shankill schools. (Further analysis of educational and social deprivation in the Shankill area is contained in the Greater Shankill Regeneration Strategy Consultation Report.)
9 On 30.08.88 the Irish News catalogued some of the Civil Rights gains:

The establishment of the Housing Executive ended for ever the disgraceful policy of discrimination which had fuelled the Dungannon march. The re-introduction of PR and the abolition of gerrymandering ensured a fair system of representation in all areas. The setting up of the Fair Employment Agency and recent steps to strengthen its powers have made discrimination a much more difficult process. And, largely as a result of the Civil Rights challenge, Stormont itself has gone for ever.

10 Former prisoner who, through the Ulster Democratic Party, tried to move Loyalist paramilitaries away from the gun and towards the political approach. In July 1994, while engaged in negotiations with a wide spectrum of political opinion – including Catholic clergy – he was murdered by the IRA.
Last year we reported that Sir Patrick Mayhew had announced he was to introduce 50% remission for all prisoners in NI. At the time, we felt that this was not enough. We still feel that way; however, we did accept that it was a first step in the right direction, with the expectation that there would be more movement as the peace process unravelled.

He also stated that, due to the different atmosphere pertaining in the country, the 'risk factor' would be taken into consideration when life-sentence prisoners were having their sentences reviewed. Sadly, I have to report to the conference, that one year on, two years into the Loyalists ceasefire, there has been no further movement whatsoever on the issue of prisoners, and also no movement whatsoever on the reviews of life sentence prisoners.

Since last year, we have endeavoured to get movement on prisoners. We have had numerous meetings on prisoners, meetings with NIO. Officials, Prison Officials, Civil Servants, John Wheeler, Michael Ancram, and Patrick Mayhew. Despite all these meetings, the government has not shown any willingness to change their position on prisoners.

I must take this opportunity to clarify our position paper on prisoners because it was not, as some would have you believe, a demand to open up the gates and let everyone walk out. Our submission to the government contained 30 pages of measured, constructive, and achievable steps to bring about the eventual release of prisoners. Included in that submission were confidence-building measures such as increased paroles; extended time of paroles; reduction in qualifying criteria for paroles; greater flexibility in paroles; greater access to education, training schemes, and job programmes; access and recognition of LPWA on a par with other Welfare Organisations, etc., etc.

I regretfully state that the government did not help or contribute to any of these points. In the event of Canary Wharf, Manchester, Innsbruck, and Killyhevlin when the Loyalists ceasefire was coming under tremendous strain and we were looking for help, support, for even a tiny movement on prisons and other issues to shore up the Loyalist ceasefire, the government gave nothing – they gave nothing but patronising pats on the back.

Eight weeks ago, a PUP delegation met with Sir Patrick Mayhew and expressed concerns at the lack of movement on prison issues. At his sugges-
tion, a shopping list was prepared and sent to him which included phased released, increased remission, review of life-sentence prisoners, equity in the parole system between men and women, extensions of compassionate home leave, and — wait for it! — the ending of the practice of handcuffing prisoners on hospital appointments. Yes, two years into a Loyalist ceasefire and our prisoners are still being handcuffed while going to hospital for treatment. Only recently, one particular prisoner was handcuffed to the hospital bed.

Eight weeks later, we have not even received a reply to any of these points. Two weeks ago, representatives of the UDA prisoners in Long Kesh announced through the media that the UDA/UFF prisoners had told them they had removed their support from the peace process. The sentiments they expressed were shared by all Loyalists both inside and outside the prison.

- The continued violence by Republicans.
- The lack of progress with the political process.
- The failure of the government to recognise the efforts of the Loyalist leadership in sustaining the peace.

Last Monday, a terrible burden was placed on W F/RHC prisoners as the media and the world looked towards them to see what their position was in the peace process. It was an unique occasion as a delegation of 14 was allowed inside the prison were they met a group of 30 prisoners in the prison gym. As we sat around a make-shift conference table, prisoners exchanged their views with their colleagues in the delegation. For three and half hours, the discussion varied, covering all aspects of the current position. The acoustics in the building were not ideal, and as the meeting moved into its final stage, two dull thuds, 15 minutes apart, were heard. As news of the Lisburn bombs filtered through, we all felt anger, disgust, and bewilderment at this deliberate attempt at mass murder of men, women, and children by violent Republicans.

At that point, it would have been so easy to allow emotions to run rampant; it would have been understandable if prisoners had lost faith in the peace process. But they did not. They continued the meeting with determination, courage, and restraint. They did not allow the I.R.A. to deflect or to sabotage the purpose of the meeting. They asked us to relay their sympathies for those injured, and now sadly, to the family of Warrant Officer, James Bradwell, who died yesterday as a result of the Lisburn bombs.

We left Long Kesh on Monday with clear resolve from the prisoners. They said that, while there was a ray of light, a glimmer of hope, left in the peace process, for the sake of the people of NI, for the sake of the 'future of the NI,' we should continue to strive to make the process work. I wish you all could have
been there to hear their unselfishness and comforting attitude. You would have been proud of them.

There are a number of elements that contribute to the success of the Loyalist ceasefire. The leadership of the Loyalist paramilitaries on the outside showed great courage and foresight, not only in calling the ceasefire, but in maintaining that ceasefire for the past two years through the most difficult times.

The PUP gave political analysis and direction and articulated the new and real voice of Loyalism. The other element of course is the people we have just been talking about. Throughout the whole two years, our prisoners have never wavered in their support for the leadership on the outside and the PUP. Whenever we needed a shoulder to lean on, they have been there. Whenever the ceasefire has been under stress, they have been there to prop it up and lend support. Their contribution to the peace process is unquantifiable.

When we call for the phased release of prisoners, it is not just for the purpose of getting people out. The confidence-building measures leading to release cement the process, consolidate the process, and conclude the process. We hope that the conference will support the continued efforts to secure the ultimate release of all Loyalist Prisoners of War.
You have heard many tales
Of the World’s famous jails;
But this tale might come as a shock!
For, it’s here, at the Maze,
That a monster was raised –
And it goes by the name of ‘H’ Block.

Sure they levelled the ground
For some miles all around;
And then built it, with wire, brick, and steel.
As it rose from the mire,
Spewing forth its barbed-wire,
Britain swore it would bring us to heal.

They invented a cell,
(That’s a pure, white-walled Hell!)
With a purpose which burns a man’s soul.
Made to make the mind bend;
Never ever to mend –
Till the man’s in his grave, oh so cold!

At the start it worked well,
As statistics did tell –
The Beast had its captives all beat.
Until out of the gloom,
And the misery ‘n’ doom;
Came a protest that knows no defeat!

Prisoners threw off their clothes;
Blue-striped shirts, belts ‘n’ bows –
A grey blanket they donned that was coarse.
No more orders they took,
Not from no system’s book;
Yes, by God, we’re a potent wee force!
With psychology’s tricks;
Beating prisoners with sticks;
And all sorts of stunts to get at us!
The great Beast’s in a rage,
All within its steel cage –
But, we’re here ‘til political-status!

Taking all they could take
For our protest to break;
And thinking themselves oh so clever!
But, we’ve bent, not an inch;
Never once seen to flinch –
We’re prepared to protest forever!

Now, the time is at hand,
When this Beast in our land;
Must go down to the Pit, ne’re to rise.
Then we all shall go free –
“Prod’ and “Mick”, you ‘n’ me!
Peace at last under Ulster’s blue skies.

Soon the tables will turn,
And all ‘H’ Block will burn!
Then this Beast will go down mid the slaughter.
And the fate of its ‘Screws’,
For their traitorous dues –
Execution! Then hung, drawn ‘n’ quartered!

“Til that time here we’ll bide,
One for all, side by side,
On the ‘Blanket’ – to Hell with ‘em all!
For we know in our hearts,
That we’ve all played our parts –
That the Beast, that is ‘H’ Block, must fall.
The Man from Cell 15

A Prisoner

In a cell at the furthest end of the Block
Lives a man in a world of his own.
His body they’ve trapped and caged within;
But his mind has just up and flown!
His thoughts are of places, and people he’s met,
And of wondrous things he has seen –
They’ve tried many times, but they can’t bend the mind
Of the man from cell fifteen.

They’ve taken away penal-parcels and ‘shop,’
All privileges have gone just the same.
The reasons for this was a temper too quick;
Tho’ at times he sure wasn’t to blame.
He’s been many trips to the Punishment Block,
‘Bread ‘n’ water has made him quite lean –
They’ve tried many times, but they can’t bend the mind
Of the man from cell fifteen.

‘Screws’ banged ‘pon his door at dawn’s early light,
After keeping him from his night’s sleep.
They thought that the din and the rumpus they made
Would make the tired man ‘jump ‘n’ leap’!
On his bunk he lay still, with his strong stubborn will,
And just acted like they’d never been!
They’ve tried many times, but they can’t bend the mind
Of the man from cell fifteen.

Now, to make him be meek, one visit per week,
They allowed him to have, stead of three.
This cost him his wife, and the loves of his life;
The two children who’d sat on his knee.
But he changed, not a bit, tho’ alone he would sit;
In his eyes there now burns a bright sheen –
(They might break his heart!) But they can’t bend the mind
Of the man from cell fifteen.
Soon his heartaches will mend, tho’ his mind just won’t bend,
At their own game, he’ll beat them, I’ll bet.
And I think we might find, that by using his mind,
He’ll get freed from his prison-cell, yet!
Then, beware all the fools who bent all the rules;
And abused him with curses obscene –
‘Cause they must face the wrath, for crossing the path,
Of the man from cell fifteen.

A Loyal Heart

A Prisoner

From loyal veins my life I drew,
In loyal arms I lay,
From loyal lips the lessons knew,
That led me day by day,
And hushed to rest on a loyal breast,
And rocked on a loyal knee,
They woke and grew ... and thank GOD too ...
A loyal heart in me.

Then came the day for all to view,
When lies and scorn held sway,
Incited by a ‘bastion of virtue’
They swore my life away,
But, for good or ill, I am loyal still,
They can decree
To stop the beat or force retreat,
Of the loyal heart in me.

At times I sigh, at times I jest,
‘Mid scenes and faces strange,
And yet the years within my heart,
Have wrought little or no change,
A memory of old, ever bright I hold,
Since rocked on a loyal knee.
And for her dear sake ... no jail will break
This loyal heart in me.