



## **Principles of Loyalism**

### **An Internal Discussion Paper**

**1st November 2002**

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### **Introduction**

Ever since the declaration of the ceasefires in 1994 the conflict and fragmentation within the Unionist community generally, and the loyalist community in particular, has gotten progressively worse. The political conflict between pro and anti agreement unionists has split whole communities and led to divisions even within families and it is not stretching the point too far to say that the conflict within unionism is as bitter at times as the conflict between unionists and nationalists. The problem is even worse within the constituency of unionism that supports the several loyalist paramilitary groups. Here, the conflict has resulted in violence, death and injury. Again, the conflict within loyalism is often as bitter and violent as the conflict between loyalism and republicanism.

The fragmentation, rivalries and outbreaks of violent conflict within loyalism poses a greater threat to the Union than does the combined threat posed by nationalists and republicans. Our churches are divided, our political parties are divided, our loyal orders are divided, our paramilitary groups are divided and our communities are divided. Meanwhile both nationalism and republicanism, while divided as to tactics and strategy, maintain a unity of purpose. The warning contained in the slogan, "United We Stand, Divided We Fall", will go unheeded at our peril.

It is imperative that loyalists engage in a process of conflict transformation that will not only transform the nature of the conflict between unionism and nationalism, but more importantly, that will transform relationships between those involved in conflict within unionism and loyalism. The process of addressing inter-community conflict and violence cannot be properly addressed while the issue of intra-community conflict within loyalism and unionism continues to divide and weaken us.

## **Back to Basics**

One cannot attempt to engage in the process of conflict transformation unless they first try to understand the nature of the conflict as seen through the eyes and the experiences of the several protagonists. The Principles of Loyalism is an attempt to put forward the key elements of the loyalist cause that were established by the founding fathers of unionism at the time of the Home Rule crisis. Loyalists need a set of core principles based on those principles that enjoyed the popular support of the unionist community in the struggle against Home Rule. Such a set of principles is clearly set out in Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant and this is an appropriate starting point for any serious discussion on the subject.

This historic document, which was endorsed by some 450,000 Ulster men and women from all sections of the pro-unionist community, has been said by some to be the Birth Certificate of modern Ulster. It is certainly the one document that summarises why Ulster Unionists in 1912 sought to ensure that Northern Ireland remained an integral part of the United Kingdom. That Northern Ireland remained within the United Kingdom when the rest of Ireland seceded from the union is due to both the political resolve and the military resolve of those who signed the Covenant and backed up their intentions with the formation of a volunteer army.

The Solemn League and Covenant was to the birth of Northern Ireland what the Revolutionary Settlement of 1689 was to the birth of Britain's Constitutional Monarchy and the principle of parliamentary sovereignty. It was, and remains, a revolutionary document insofar as it claimed that the will of the British citizens of Northern Ireland took precedence over the will of the Imperial Parliament. It established a covenantal relationship between the British citizens of Northern Ireland which, in the absence of it being rescinded by the people of Northern Ireland, remains the foundation document of Loyalism.

Today's loyalists are the covenant children of those who signed the Covenant and as such have a duty to maintain those core principles of that Covenant which remain appropriate in the 21st century. These include: - 1. The Material well-being of Ulster; 2. Civil and Religious Freedom; 3. Equal Citizenship within the United Kingdom and 4. The Use of Armed Resistance. Each of these core principles ought to provide a basis for unity within unionism and, in particular, within the loyalist paramilitary-linked constituencies.

One of the principles of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant that does not have the same relevance now as it did in 1912 is "the unity of the Empire". The British Empire no longer exists, but the unity of the peoples who made up the Empire is maintained through the Commonwealth of Nations from which the Irish Republic withdrew in 1948. Fifty-four other free and independent nations all of which, with one exception, have had past ties to a Commonwealth country remain united in a bond of political friendship and social and economic cooperation. Some political commentators and academics have suggested that the concept of Britishness held by Ulster Unionists in 1912 was a concept that related more to the Empire than it did to England. It is appropriate therefore that some reference to both the Empire and the Commonwealth of Nations is included in our discussion about the Principles of Loyalism.

## **Loyalism Has More to Offer**

It has often been said, and there is much truth in the saying, that loyalists know what they are against, but they don't necessarily know what they are for. Throughout the recent violent conflict they have focused on reacting to republican violence and this has been largely based on the law of retaliation – "an eye for an eye". While there were many conflicts within loyalism throughout the course of the conflict they were united in their belief that republican violence had to be met with loyalist counter violence. There was always the danger that when republican violence ended, and the need for loyalist retaliatory violence ended, that loyalists would turn in on themselves and the hidden intra-loyalist conflicts and rivalries would come to the fore. That is what has happened.

A loyalism that is based on the core principles of the Solemn League & Covenant has more to offer the people of Ulster than violence. A philosophy that is based simply on violence will lock our people and our communities into a perpetual cycle of alienation, conflict and violence. It also misrepresents what loyalism is really about. A loyalism that is based on the principles of the Solemn League and Covenant is a loyalism that is committed to seeking the material (social & economic) well being of the people of Northern Ireland. It is a loyalism that is genuinely committed to upholding the principles of civil and religious liberty for all citizens of Northern Ireland. It is a loyalism that is committed to defending for ourselves and our children the principles of equal citizenship; and it is a loyalism that is proud to identify with peoples of the Commonwealth and with the values, principles and priorities of the Commonwealth. Yes, there is a place for armed resistance to unjust political impositions and to terror campaigns, but a principled loyalism that has its roots in the Solemn League & Covenant has much more to offer the people of Ulster.

## **Principle 1**

### **The Material Well-Being of Ulster**

*“Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as of the whole of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship and perilous to the unity of the Empire...”*

## **Introduction**

The framers of the Solemn League and Covenant had a concern, not just for the constitutional issues and the principles of civil and religious liberty, but also for the material well being of the people.

That the material well being of Ulster is the first of the principles set out in the Covenant is no accident. It is a recognition that the material well being of any people is essential if they are to develop a just and prosperous society. Our covenanting forbears knew that material, or social and economic, well-being is essential to the quality of life that is required to enjoy civil and political freedom. There is no point in talking about the principles of civil and religious liberty and equal citizenship if we do not have the quality of life that is necessary to enjoy them.

## **Economic Arguments**

Those who tell us that loyalism has nothing to do with bread and butter politics clearly do not understand the principles of the Solemn League and Covenant or the economic arguments against Home Rule that were put forward by Ulster Unionists at the time of the Home Rule crisis. The political commentator, Paul Bew, has noted that “economic factors played a key role in the generation of unionist opposition to home rule” and that “unionists always insisted that the industrial progress of Belfast depended on complete economic integration with the United Kingdom and imperial market”. Thomas Sinclair, one of the leading liberal unionists and businessmen of the Home Rule period, was adamant that the incorporation of Ulster into an independent Irish State would be recipe for economic disaster.

Ulster was the centre of Ireland’s manufacturing industry. Anthony Alcock (Understanding Ulster, 1994) has pointed out that “In 1907 Belfast alone provided one-third of Irish industrial output and two-thirds of Ireland’s industrial exports”. One reason for Belfast’s success, says Alcock, “was the vertical linkages between so many of its industries, rope works, engineering factories, chemical works, feeding off linen and shipbuilding so that efficient delivery of the final product could be easily be achieved”. Another reason for the success of these enterprises was their dependence “on export markets and sources of raw materials in the extensive free trade area of the British Empire”.

Ulster’s manufacturing industry was inextricably linked to both the United Kingdom and the British Empire and would most certainly have suffered greatly if that link had been broken and was subjected to a programme of economic protectionism under a Home Rule Parliament.

## **The Economic Realities**

Our forbears believed that the continued successful development of Ulster’s manufacturing industry, together with the quality of life which that success could bring to the people of Ulster, would be better achieved within the United Kingdom. Their concerns about the economic future of Ulster within an independent Irish state were well founded and there is ample evidence to suggest that, until the advent of the so-called Celtic Tiger, the Irish economy lagged far behind that of the United Kingdom. The economists, Esmond Birnie and Patrick Roche, have pointed out that by the late 1980’s the Irish economy “had notched up the unenviable distinction of being the worst performing economy in western Europe in the twentieth century”.

Suggestions that the Irish ‘tiger’ economy is now the fastest growing in Europe, and that this cancels out the economic argument against a united Ireland, are not convincing. They have not convinced Mary Harney of the Progressive Democrats who has referred to the ‘tiger economy’ as the “economics of self-delusion”. Nor have they convinced Paddy Roche and Esmond Birnie of the Cadogan Group who believe that “rumours of a Republic of Ireland economic miracle have been much exaggerated” and remind us of the fact that during the 1990’s the Republic “was the most subsidised state in Europe”. Roche and Birnie are still of the opinion that the standard of living in the Republic remains lower than that in Northern Ireland.

In 1993 the British Government was subsidising Northern Ireland to the tune of £1,600 per head per annum. The British subvention ensured that living standards in Northern Ireland were around 40% higher than in the Republic and that government spending was two-thirds higher. This subvention is far above anything that the Irish Government can hope to meet in the foreseeable future, consequently living standards in Northern Ireland would fall and public services would be drastically cut in a 32-county independent Ireland.

Notwithstanding the adverse effects of a sustained terrorist campaign, which included economic targets as part of its strategy, the business community in Northern Ireland has continued to prosper. In an address to the Ulster Unionist Council

in April 1999, David Trimble remarked, "The great success story of the last decade has been the entrepreneurial skills of Ulster folk. Small businesses started by local people have one of the best growth records of any part of the UK. They have consistently outperformed their equivalents in the Republic of Ireland, consistently adding two to three thousand jobs a year".

### **The Need for a Social Agenda**

We live in a different era and face different challenges to the material well-being of our people than did our forbears. Nevertheless, it remains our belief that the social and economic welfare of our people will best be served within the United Kingdom.

A commitment to the material well-being of Ulster demands the development of a social agenda, and loyalists must have a social agenda if they are to advance the social and economic well-being of their people. In an address to Business and Community Leaders in 1998 David Trimble argued that as we move forward away from violence to democracy "real politics will become the order of the day". He went on to identify real political issues as being about schools, hospitals, agriculture, the environment and employment.

Access to the necessities of life is a basic human right for all citizens. Loyalists have a duty to ensure that our people have satisfactory housing that meets the social needs of our people, gainful employment that provides a living wage under satisfactory terms and conditions of employment, adequate health care from the cradle to the grave that is free to all at the point of delivery, efficient public services and utilities that are controlled by elected representatives and accountable to the public, a safe and healthy environment that enhances individual and community life, and a free education system that provides life-long learning for all citizens.

Real politics will also include developing and pursuing initiatives that will assist in the development of safe and secure communities and the development of rigorous opposition to organised crime, the illicit drugs trade, the vice trade, anti-social behaviour, racketeering and sectarian conflict. The cost of organised crime is something that the government and the business community do not absorb by themselves. It is met by all of us. Essential finances that should be channelled into developing more effective and efficient public services are re-directed towards crime prevention, crime detection, legal proceedings and compensation.

Every pound that ends up in the coffers of the criminal is one less pound circulating through the local economy. It is one less pound that the business community can reinvest in local business. It is one less pound that employers can use to create new jobs and increase wages. But it is not just a pound here and a pound there - the cost of organised crime amounts to millions of pounds here and millions of pounds there. Organised crime is not simply an attack on the business community or the government; it is an attack on the whole community. It is as damaging to the people of Northern Ireland as the violence of the bloody conflict from which we are emerging, and it deserves the same response.

The social and economic well-being of the people of Northern Ireland should be as important to loyalists as the maintenance of the union with Great Britain. That union would be meaningless without the people who make up that union. Anything that militates against the ability of the government and civic society to watch over, promote and protect the morale and the welfare the people of Northern Ireland is subversive of the well-being of the people of Northern Ireland and must be opposed by all genuine loyalists.

### **The Need for Political Development**

Involvement in the political affairs of Northern Ireland must not be limited to those who have traditionally seen themselves as the political leaders of unionism. Working class loyalists have as much right as anyone else to engage in what David Trimble describes as "real politics".

For the majority of working class Protestants-Unionists growing up in the forties, the fifties and the sixties, good citizenship was about knowing your place. Those at the top of the social order were supposed to be our betters - better educated, better mannered, better bred, better off socially and better off financially. They were the ones to whom we were supposed to doff the cap or touch the forelock. Loyalists were encouraged to be followers, not leaders. Thirty years of conflict in which our working class (often workless class) communities were left to fend for themselves has changed all that. Men who spent between ten and eighteen years in the University of Long Kesh and women who learned leadership skills and economic skills in home extension courses from that same University are redefining what loyalism and equal citizenship means to them.

There is a growing awareness amongst many loyalists that they have a role to play in the political development of their communities. To do that effectively, our people need to trust us and respect us, and we need to earn that trust and that respect. A volunteer movement must identify with the people whom it claims to represent. It must operate on the basis of mutual trust and respect, not through fear. If ordinary people within the loyalist communities fear us, as opposed to respecting us, we cannot say that we have their interests at heart. They need to see that we represent a loyalism that is

genuinely interested in their material well-being.

Political development for loyalists is essential if we are to help in regenerating our communities and in combating deprivation, alienation and powerlessness. It is through political development that we can provide our people with the skills to take on tasks and to negotiate with providers. The involvement of released prisoners, former paramilitary activists and others within the loyalist constituency in the political process will enable them to embrace the principles of participative democracy and to play an active role in working for social change and for the enrichment of their own personal lives as well as the corporate life of their community.

If we, as loyalists, are genuinely interested in promoting the material well-being of Ulster we will engage in the political process and seek to empower the loyalist people to take ownership of their own lives and their own future. It is the duty of the volunteers to co-operate with the political process by ensuring that our political and community activists have a safe environment within which to work, and that our communities are safe and secure and free from all that would harm the personal, social or economic welfare of the people.

## **Principle 2**

### **Civil & Religious Freedom**

*"Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as of the whole of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship and perilous to the unity of the Empire..."*

### **Introduction**

The framers of the Solemn League and Covenant believed that an Irish Home Rule Parliament, comprised in the main of Catholic Nationalists who were committed to a Confessional State, would be "subversive of our civil and religious freedom" and could never afford them the freedoms that were essential to the development of a just and equitable society. Even the most casual reading of Irish history will find the issue of civil and religious freedom a cause for concern for Ulster Protestants. Civil and religious freedom is essential to the development of a just, equitable and pluralist society.

Religious liberty can flourish only if the State leaves religion alone. Citizens must be free to practice religion or not to practice religion without government interference. The principle of civil and religious liberty is a legacy of both the Puritan Revolution of 1648 and the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89. It must be admitted that the degree and the extent of those freedoms were far from perfect in the wake of the Glorious Revolution. Roman Catholics and Protestant Dissenters continued to suffer discrimination and persecution both in Great Britain and in Ireland where the notorious Penal Laws, which Irish Catholics rightly complain about, were also imposed against Presbyterians and other Dissenters. However in the course of time the principle of civil and religious freedom has become an integral part of the British way of life.

### **Catholic Social Policy in the Republic**

The policies of both the Free State Government under Cosgrove and the Irish Republic under Eamon de Valera proved that the fears of Ulster Unionists were well founded. Until recently the cry "Home Rule is Rome Rule" was a fair reflection of the confessional nature of both the Irish Constitution and Irish Politics. In recent years the Irish Republic has become more liberal and pluralist, but it remains our belief that the United Kingdom is better suited to the development of a multi-faith pluralist society than the Irish Republic. Indeed it may be argued that the republican concept of citizenship is inimical to pluralism.

Although the 1922 Constitution of the Irish Free State claimed that freedom of religion was a right of every citizen of the Free State this amounted to little more than a right to worship. It was basic toleration. Nothing more, nothing less. In a state where social affairs were governed by the Canon Law of the Catholic Church it was inevitable that the religious beliefs of the dominant sector of the Irish Parliament would lead to an imposition of Catholic social teaching on the Protestant minority. As far back as 1850 the Catholic Hierarchy in Ireland, under the powerful influence of Cardinal Cullen, adopted an extreme conservative and anti-Protestant position that was to give rise to a form of Catholic Nationalism that was incompatible with the development of a just and democratic society.

The deliberations of the Synod of Thurles (1850) followed by a series of articles by Edmund O'Reilly, theological advisor to Cardinal Cullen, echoed a warning of what life would be like in a Catholic Irish State.

O'Reilly's articles appeared in the Irish Monthly during 1873-74 and purported to set forth the social policy of the Catholic Church. These articles clearly revealed that social policy in a Catholic State should be determined by the social policy of the



Catholic Church. This is in fact what happened. In her book, *The Constitutional History of Eire/Ireland*, Angela Clifford notes "The identity of the Church and civil society envisaged by the Rev O'Reilly in the 1880s was established in fact during the half century following independence". Indeed she states quite clearly "The most important institution in the actual constitution of the Irish State has been the Catholic Hierarchy. During the twenties and thirties it gave purpose and coherence to the State".

The papal "Ne Temere" decree announced by the Vatican in 1907 was rigidly enforced under both the Free State and the Irish Republic. This decree forced Protestant partners in a mixed marriage to formally sign a document stating that all children of the marriage would be raised in the Catholic Faith and was largely responsible for the marked decline in the Protestant population from approximately 11% at the time of the secession to approximately 3% today.

In an attempt to keep the new Irish state free from anti-Catholic influences the Free State Government established a board of Censors under the 1929 Censorship Act. While this Act obviously affected the importation and distribution of Protestant and socialist literature it also affected many Irish writers. Some of Ireland's best writers – Clarke, Shaw, Gogarty, O'Flaherty, Moore, Hackett - fell foul of the censors. Indeed, writers of the standing of Frank O'Connor and Sean O'Faolain, both of whom served the republican cause with distinction, expressed their disenchantment with the repressive attitude of the censorship laws, and the disgraceful treatment meted out by the censors and the Catholic Church to Peadar O'Donnell, another writer who had served the republican cause with distinction, is well documented. Again, in a bid to protect the Catholic population from the influences of Protestants, socialists and other free thinkers the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles Mc Quaide, banned Catholics from studying at Trinity College Dublin. This ban was not lifted until 1970. The father of Mary Robinson, former President of the Republic, had to get a special dispensation from the Catholic Hierarchy so that she could attend Trinity.

### **De Valera's Catholic Nation**

The Irish Republic under de Valera committed itself to the development of a society that reinforced its Catholicism. As early as 1931 de Valera claimed "There was an Irish solution that had no reference to any other country; a solution that came from our traditional attitude to life that was Irish and Catholic. That was the solution they were going to stand for so long as they were Catholic". Four years later, in his St. Patrick's Day address to the nation, de Valera made it quite clear that Ireland was a Catholic nation - "Since the coming of St Patrick 1500 years ago Ireland has been a Christian and a Catholic nation" and, he concluded, "she will remain a Catholic nation".

There was no mistaking where de Valera stood - Ireland was, and would continue to be, a Catholic nation. Nationalists are quick to point out that Sir James Craig, when prime Minister of Northern Ireland, referred to Northern Ireland as a "Protestant state for a Protestant people". The wording attributed to Craig is incorrect and what he did say is never set in context. Craig's words, which were spoken in 1934, (three years after de Valera's) were "In the South they boasted of a Catholic state. They still boast of Southern Ireland being a Catholic state. All I boast of is that we are a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant state". De Valera's attitude provides no moral justification for Craig's position, but it does put it in context.

In a radio broadcast on 15th June 1937, in which de Valera commended his new Constitution to the Irish people, he had this to say, "There is a stage in the life of every community in which its customs as well as its philosophy of life pass into laws. A system of law which is divorced from the convictions, the beliefs and spiritual character of a people is in no sense a national code". De Valera was making it clear that his new Constitution was basically a Catholic Constitution for a Catholic Nation. Indeed Article 44 of the new Constitution recognised "the special position of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church as the guardian of the faith professed by the great majority of its citizens".

De Valera was open about where he stood on matters of faith and politics when he declared, "If I had a vote on a local body, and if there were two qualified people who had to deal with a Catholic community, and if one was a Catholic and the other was a Protestant, I would unhesitatingly vote for the Catholic". When Mayo County Council refused to appoint a graduate of Trinity College Dublin to a post in the county library, de Valera supported the decision on the grounds that the candidate was a Protestant and that the Catholic community, which had a 98% majority in the county, had a right to insist on a Catholic being appointed.

Patrick Murray, in the Preface to his book *The Oracles of God* acknowledges "a notable feature of de Valera's strategy as leader of Fianna Fail was his firm identification of the party with specifically Roman Catholic interests". Murray, whose book is sub-titled *The Roman Catholic Church and Irish Politics 1922-1937*, goes on to say these (Roman Catholic) interests were also generally served by Cumann na nGaedheal governments. "In both instances", writes Murray, "there was a widespread congruence between religious conviction and political expedience on the part of politicians". In January 1933 the Irish Press was able to claim that there was not a social or economic change that Fianna Fail had proposed or brought in that had not its fullest justification in the encyclicals of either the (then) current Pope or those of Pope Leo XIII.

The self-proclaimed socialist principles of the Irish Labour Party did not prevent its members from putting the interests of the Catholic Hierarchy before socialist and trade union interests. At the 1937 Labour Party Conference, Gerard Mc Gown TD,

announced that "we are Catholics first and politicians afterwards". During the Mother & Child controversy in 1951 the Labour Leader, William Norton, adopted a similar position.

### **Who Governs: The Dail or the Bishops?**

Things had changed little by the fifties. The refusal of former IRA leader Sean Mac Bride, when in government, to stand up to the power of the Catholic Church confirms the comments of J. Bowyer Bell that "In power republicans were as subservient to Rome as they were rebellious in opposition". Mac Bride's willingness to uphold the Catholic nature of modern republicanism was well documented during the "Mother & Child" controversy in 1951, the year in which (according to Angela Clifford) "the leaders of the Government and Opposition all made solemn statements in the Dail that the Dail ought not even to contemplate legislation of which the Bishops disapproved".

Dr Noel Browne, who was the then Minister for Health in the Coalition Government, had proposed a Mother & Child Scheme to which the Catholic Hierarchy objected. Mac Bride opted to back the bishops and was trenchant in his condemnation of his colleague. Speaking in the Irish Parliament on the issue, Mac Bride had this to say, "Those of us in this House who are Catholics, and all of us in the Government who are Catholics are, as such of course, bound to give obedience to the rulings of our Church and of our Hierarchy". The 1951 version of the "Mac Bride Principles" insisted that social policy must conform to the teaching of the bishops. Mac Bride's sectarianism was further highlighted when he publicly denounced Dr. Browne for daring to have his photograph taken with the Protestant Archbishop of Dublin.

Mac Bride's position was backed by Prime Minister Costello who informed the House " I, as a Catholic, obey my Church authorities and will continue to do so, in spite of the Irish Times or anything else". Not to be outdone, the leader of the Irish Labour Party, William Norton wound up the debate with these words, "...there will be no flouting of the authority of the Bishops in the matter of Catholic social or Catholic moral teaching".

Peadar Cowan, a member of Mac Bride's own party, raised one of the very few voices of dissent. Cowan expressed his concerns at the revelation that the real government of the country may not be the Government elected by the people but the "Bishops meeting secretly and enforcing their rule by means of private interviews with Ministers". He went on to say, "As a Catholic, I object to this usurpation of authority of the Government by Bishops".

The Sean Mac Bride referred to here was the same Sean Mac Bride who, in 1934, organised an IRA unit to prevent several busloads of Protestants from Belfast from attending the annual Bodenstown commemorations. Elements of the IRA Army Council, led by Sean Mac Bride and Moss Twomey, clearly had no time for either Protestants or 'secular' Catholics. It was not just Protestants of a Unionist persuasion who met with Mac Bride's disapproval. He disapproved of all Protestants, even those who aligned themselves with a secular republicanism of which the bishops disapproved. George Gilmore, a Protestant member of Republican Congress, later remarked that it would be a long time before "Come on the Shankill" would be heard again at Bodenstown. Gilmore's comments were prophetic. Protestants and Dissenters have never since believed that modern-day republicanism has the spirit to accommodate non-Catholics. Clearly the clause in the 1916 Proclamation, "Cherishing all the children of the nation equally", had been erased from the version held by the IRA.

Unionist fears about their inclusion in a 32 County Catholic State were well founded. Things have improved greatly since the fifties. The liberalising influences of the sixties and the impact of Vatican II have helped to create a more liberal State. The power and influence of the Catholic Church is not what it was, though the Hierarchy's attempt to censor President Mc Aleese for taking communion in a Protestant Church and the furore over Cecilia Larkin's relationship with Bertie Ahern suggests that the desire for social and political control is still there.

There are indications that Sinn Fein, in spite of its public commitment to non-sectarian politics, is at heart a Catholic Nationalist party. Sinn Fein spokespersons repeatedly refer to the Irish community indiscriminately as "the Catholic community", "the Nationalist community" and "the Republican Community" thus reminding Protestants that even as we move into the 21st century the Republican Movement sees itself primarily as a Catholic Nationalist movement which holds the title deeds to the term "Irish".

### **Pluralism Versus Confessionalism**

A loyalist response to the development of a Catholic Confessional State should not be the establishment of a Protestant Confessional State. If equal citizenship within the United Kingdom is to have any real meaning for loyalists, we must seek to develop a multi-cultural and multi-faith society that is in keeping with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Nationalists will complain that we are harping back to the old days. That we have too long a memory and need to draw a line under the past and concentrate on the present and the future. At the same time they are quite happy to harp back to the penal laws, the famine and allegations of discrimination under the old Stormont regime. Nationalism demands the right to embrace the politics of victim-hood while denying that right to unionists.

In highlighting the fact that the fears of our forbears regarding the threat to civil and religious liberty under a Home Rule Parliament were grounded in reality we do not ignore the fact that the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland suffered under a Protestant-Unionist dominated Stormont Government. De Valera's Catholic Constitution for a Catholic Nation was mirrored in Unionism's A Protestant Parliament for a Protestant People. The infringement of civil and religious liberty in one political jurisdiction does not make it right to replicate those infringements in another jurisdiction. No less a person than David Trimble has acknowledged that "Ulster Unionists, fearful of being isolated on the island, built a solid house, but it was a cold house for Catholics".

As we move into the 21st century we must acknowledge that civil and religious liberty is a basic human right that must be afforded to all people. What we demand for ourselves we must demand for others. The Irish Republic is moving away from the idea of a confessional state towards a more pluralist one and there is a clear movement within civic unionist and progressive loyalist circles towards the concept of a more equitable and pluralist society.

An equal society is one in which all members have access to similar resources and opportunities and in which they all value each other for their common humanity regardless of their religious beliefs, or lack of them. Protestantism holds that God is the Creator of all mankind and that He created them all equal in dignity and in human value. It is, therefore, a Christian imperative (as well as an ethical political imperative) that we proclaim that all men and women are born equal in dignity and worth and are, therefore, to be valued for their common humanity.

When anyone's religious freedom is denied, everyone's religious freedom is in danger. Religious freedom is not rooted in any philosophical ideal or theological doctrine; nor is it rooted in any Constitution or Bill of Rights. It is rooted and grounded in the very nature and being and personhood of God in Whose image all mortals are made. Civil and Religious liberty are natural and fundamental rights that must be promoted and defended by all who claim the title of Loyalist.

We believe that the multi-cultural multi-faith pluralist society that is being developed across the United Kingdom provides the basis for such freedoms. Loyalists who are sincere in their support for the principles of civil and religious liberty will positively uphold the right of each individual regardless of gender, race, colour, religion, political opinion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, prison record or social background to be treated with equality, dignity and justice in all aspects and spheres of human life.

The loyalist activist will also be a human rights activist and will work to ensure that the rights and liberties of the people living and working within his or her community are not infringed. If the principles of Civil and Religious Liberty are to be more than a mere slogan on a banner or an Orange Arch they must be practiced.

## **Principle 3**

### **Equal Citizenship Within the United Kingdom**

*"Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as of the whole of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship and perilous to the unity of the Empire..."*

*"We...do hereby pledge ourselves in solemn Covenant throughout this our time of threatened calamity to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom..."*

### **Introduction**

Our forbears believed that Ulster's incorporation into an independent Irish State would be destructive of (their) citizenship and pledged to stand by one another in "defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom".

Citizenship within the context of the United Kingdom is about political identity rather than about national identity. Those citizens of the United Kingdom who regard themselves as Scottish, English, Welsh or Irish in terms of national identity are still able to enjoy full citizenship within the United Kingdom. The majority of Scotsmen and women see no contradiction in being Scottish and British. In the United States we regularly hear of people identifying themselves as Irish Americans. Why then should there be a contradiction in being both Irish and British? There are also some three million citizens of the United Kingdom from Commonwealth countries who continue to identify themselves in terms of their home country and who maintain the culture and traditions of that country, and yet see no contradiction between having a specific national identity as well as a British political identity. Citizenship within the United Kingdom has nothing to do with national identity, culture or



religion. It is about political identity and loyalty to the concept of the Union.

### **The Meaning of the “Union”**

The United Kingdom is a union of a number of historic independent kingdoms and provinces that came together firstly under the Normans in the 12th century and later through specific Acts of Union. In 944 we had the union of Anglo-Saxon Britain with Cornwall. This was followed in 1536 by the union of England and Wales, and in 1704 by the union of England & Wales with Scotland. In 1801 Ireland was brought into the union, which became the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Since the political rupture of this island when 26 counties seceded from the Union the six counties that form Northern Ireland remain part of the Union and continue to enjoy British citizenship. Even those people of Irish descent living in Great Britain who look to the Republic of Ireland as home and who are regarded by the Irish Government as part of the Irish Diaspora are still able to enjoy full citizenship within the United Kingdom. It is estimated that some seven million people of Irish extraction living in Great Britain, who regard themselves as Irish, enjoy full British citizenship. That is considerably more, almost double, the number of Irish people living in the Irish Republic.

In the choice between citizenship within a broader pluralist United Kingdom that is inclusive of all the peoples of these islands and that draws upon the culture and traditions of the several historic kingdoms and provinces as well as the culture and traditions of ethnic communities, and citizenship within a more narrow and exclusive geographical union that is exclusive in terms of culture, religion and national identity the unionist community has consistently chosen the former. Whether it is for economic reasons or not, seven million people of Irish extraction are also happy to choose the former.

The peoples who form the unionist community come from a number of diverse cultures and traditions – Irish, Scottish, English, Welsh and some of Huguenot descent. Thus they wish to maintain citizenship within a state that acknowledges and validates their historic family origins and the traditions and culture that flow from those historic roots. Citizenship for the British subject is not about a national identity or cultural exclusiveness. It is about sharing a political identity that transcends religion, culture, language and ethnicity. In short, it is about living in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic pluralist society rather than in a society where citizenship is based on national identity, religion and cultural exclusiveness.

As the Liberal Unionist, Arthur Aughey, has rightly noted “The idea of the Union is the willing community of citizens united not by creed, colour or ethnicity but by a recognition of the authority of the Union”. The United Kingdom is thus able to facilitate pluralism whereas the Irish Republic, which links citizenship to a single national identity, is inimical to pluralism.

Our forbears believed, and we share those beliefs, that the incorporation of Northern Ireland into an independent all-Ireland republic would be destructive both of their British citizenship and of their very concept of citizenship. The distinctive anti-British ethos of Irish Nationalism convinced our forbears that an independent Irish Parliament would undermine and ultimately destroy their culture and traditions. They believed that it was only by maintaining inviolate their citizenship within the United Kingdom that their sense of Britishness could be maintained. The unionist community in Northern Ireland is not alone in wishing to maintain their British connection. Some 30% of the world’s population in fifty-four free and independent countries, including thirty-three republics, choose to belong to the Commonwealth of Nations. Why? Because of their shared history with the United Kingdom.

The 1916 Proclamation was quite specific that “The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman”. The framers of the 1916 Proclamation thus claimed that the unionist community must give allegiance to the Irish Republic– an allegiance that they were not prepared to give. Ever since, Irish Republicanism has consistently demanded that the unionist community gives up its citizenship of the United Kingdom and pledge allegiance to the Irish Republic. This demand is based on the flawed belief that (1) there is only one people living on the island of Ireland who owe their allegiance to an independent Irish state and (2) that the Irish state has a right to exercise political control over the whole island.

Republicans rejected the Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland that led to the establishment of the Irish Free State, not simply because it excluded six of the Ulster counties, but because it required the Free State to provide for a Governor-General, an Oath to the Crown and common citizenship with Britain. Republicans were not going to be satisfied with Home Rule within the family of nations known as the British Empire. They desired, and still desire, to strip away every vestige of Britishness and rob the unionist people of their identity, heritage and culture.

### **Citizen or Subject!**

Republicans argue that there is no such a thing as British citizenship. They maintain that, under a Monarchy, we are mere subjects and not citizens. It is true that British citizenship is centred on loyalty to the Crown, which Britons see as the unifying principle that binds all citizens together as a political community, rather than on loyalty to a specific national identity that is exclusive and divisive and which compels people to subordinate their culture and traditions to that of the majority. The United Kingdom is now a Constitutional Monarchy, which means that I am ruled by Parliament, not by the arbitrary will

of a monarch and it could be argued that a Constitutional Monarchy is a Crowned Republic. Every citizen in a Republic is subject to the authority of the elected Government and the British citizen is under no greater subjection than the citizen of the Irish Republic or the United States of America.

The Sovereign may reign, but it is Parliament that rules. The Bill of Rights (1689) was instrumental in limiting the power of the Sovereign and in reaffirming the supreme authority of Parliament. Thus began a process by which British Monarchs were denied the right to usurp the role of Parliament and exercise arbitrary power. The Revolutionary Settlement of 1688-89, which was achieved by a front-bench agreement between the Tories and the anti-monarchist Whigs, has resulted in a permanent shift in power from the monarch to Parliament and has helped to embed the principle of parliamentary democracy.

As a constitutional monarch the Sovereign is bound by constitutional rules that greatly limit the power and the influence that he or she can exercise. The Sovereign has a right to be consulted and to offer advice, which happens during the weekly audience with the Prime Minister, but his or her role in the enactment of legislation is limited to giving the Royal Assent to Bills passed by Parliament. It is almost 300 years since the Royal Assent was last withheld. In terms of power and political bias the British Monarch has less power and authority than the Presidents of a great many Republics and, unlike many Presidents, is constitutionally bound to be politically neutral. If the principle of parliamentary democracy in the United Kingdom has its faults, and it has, those faults cannot be laid at the door of the monarchy. Parliament and those who elect Parliament must share the blame for any flaws in our system of democracy.

One loyalist explained his position as follows: - "As a unionist I choose to be a citizen of the United Kingdom and, while I am not a monarchist by conviction, I accept that the political state in which I choose to hold citizenship is a constitutional monarchy. Therefore as a loyal citizen of that state I am happy to pledge loyalty to the Queen in Parliament and, unlike some unionists, my loyalty is not conditional upon the Sovereign's adherence to any particular religion. It is conditional only upon the Sovereign remaining subject to the will of a Parliament that is freely elected by the citizens of the United Kingdom and that endorses and supports my right to equal citizenship under the Crown".

### **Reciprocal Loyalty**

While the framers of the Solemn League & Covenant professed loyalty to the Crown they made it clear that their first loyalty was to wishes of the people of Ulster. Since the Crown, in a Constitutional Monarchy, is subject to the will of Parliament our loyalty to the Crown was and remains conditional upon Parliament's recognition of the expressed will of the people of Northern Ireland. Thus our loyalty to the Crown is conditional upon Parliament endorsing and protecting the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland to maintain inviolate their British citizenship.

There is a reciprocal loyalty. The loyalist community will honour its obligations and fulfil its duties to Parliament so long as Parliament acknowledges and upholds our right to equal citizenship within the United Kingdom. As citizens of the United Kingdom we expect to be given the same rights as those enjoyed by citizens in Scotland, England and Wales, and one of the most basic of those rights is the right to have our citizenship endorsed, validated and defended.

Our citizenship is not at the disposal of any particular British Parliament or Monarch but belongs to the citizens themselves. No Parliament or Monarch has the legal or moral authority to expel the unionist community from the Union or to impose upon it conditions of citizenship that are not applicable to citizens in Scotland, England or Wales. Thus any attempt to impose joint sovereignty or any other measure that would diminish our British citizenship will be resisted.

A former Church of Ireland Archbishop of Down and Connor, Charles D'arcy, said, "We hold that no power, not even the British Parliament, has the right to deprive us of our heritage of British citizenship".

### **One Island, One Nation?**

The assumption by nationalists that Ireland was always one single undivided nation until the intervention of the British is without historical foundation and the assumption that, because Ireland is a single island, the Irish Nation has a right to political control of that island is without any substance in either natural law or international law.

Regarding the idea that Ireland was always a united nation prior to the intervention of the British, Anthony Alcock makes the following observation: -

Gaelic society was tribal with no effective central authority. The high kingship was an imposing title for which the chieftains of the clans might fight but meant little in political or military terms. It was not until the seventeenth century that Ireland was united for the first time under a central administration – by the English.

There is no natural or international law to suggest that the Irish Nation, as defined by the Constitution of the Irish Republic

or by the ideology of Irish nationalism, has a right to political control of the whole island. Indeed, as Tom Wilson has noted, "There is no natural law which requires that single islands must always correspond to single nations". If such a law did exist it would have political implications for a great many nations.

One case that comes to mind is the Iberian peninsular, which is comprised of two major countries – Spain with some 38 million inhabitants and Portugal with some 10 million people. During the 16th and 17th centuries the peninsular was under the political control of Spain and, if the majority on an island or peninsular has the right to political control over the whole geographical territory, then Spain has the right to demand that Portugal submits to Spanish rule. As Alcock points out, "The logical consequence of this ...is, therefore, that Portugal exists, not by the will of the people of Portugal, but by the will of the people of Spain". Irish nationalist support for Basque independence from Spain flies in the face of their opposition to Ulster's demand to remain separate from the Irish nation. If it is legitimate for the Basque's to opt out of the Spanish state then surely it is legitimate for Unionists to opt out of the Irish state.

The Indian sub-continent ought, by the reasoning of Irish nationalists, to constitute one single nation – the Indian nation – since it is a geographic unit. In fact that is exactly what the majority Hindu population argued for in the run up to independence. However in order to accommodate the Moslem minority we had the creation of Pakistan which was comprised of West Pakistan and East Pakistan. East Pakistan was later reconstituted as Bangladesh. What should have constituted one nation on geographical grounds are now three separate independent nations based on religious traditions. There are approximately twenty "land locked" countries with no outlet to the open sea that function as sovereign states. Who set the boundaries for these countries? Why should all, or some, of these states not be incorporated into a larger neighbouring state? There are also a number of sovereign states known in international law as "total enclaves" which are situated within other sovereign states: - Lesotho within South Africa, San Marino within Italy, Vatican City within Italy, Singapore within Malaysia, Monaco within France and Gambia within Senegal. Why have they a right to opt out of the states within which they are located? Who set the boundaries? Why can the same criteria not be applied to Northern Ireland?

Hispaniola, like Ireland, is an island and if the "one island-one nation" argument used by Irish nationalists was applied to Hispaniola the six million strong state of Haiti would have the right to govern the whole island and to incorporate the slightly smaller Dominican Republic (5.65 million) into an all-island Haitian state, as was the case between 1822 and 1844. If two political states, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, can exist side by side on the one island why can two political states not exist side-by-side on the island of Ireland? Closer to home. According to the thesis of Irish Nationalism neither Wales nor Scotland are justified in seeking independence. Both are part of the one geographical unit and, since the English are the majority on that island, it is really up to the English what happens to Scotland and Wales.

Loyalists insist that they have a right to a homeland on the island of Ireland. Our people have been here for over three hundred years – longer than Europeans have been in America – and we regard this as our home. Geographically, we live on the island of Ireland and in that sense are Irish. But politically we choose to be citizens of the United Kingdom and to maintain the historic social, economic and cultural links between all the peoples of these islands. In determining the rights of people to possess the land the question to be asked is not, "Which state lays claim to the land"? but "Which state do the inhabitants wish to belong to"? Michael Walzer, sometime Professor of Government at Harvard University, argues, "it is the coming together of a people that establishes the integrity of a territory". The integrity of Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom lies in the will of the people of Northern Ireland.

Before there can be geographical unity there must be a unity of purpose and a unity of ideology between all the people of this island. That unity of purpose and unity of ideology is missing.

### **Active Citizenship**

For citizenship to have any real meaning for the individual loyalist, he or she must be an active citizen. That means playing an active role in the life one's community. Many people assume that citizenship is simply about rights. As citizens we are entitled to certain political rights – the right to vote and to stand in elections; certain social rights – the right to education, health and social services, etc; and certain economic rights – the right to safe working conditions, a living wage and state benefits.

But citizenship is not only about rights, it is also about duties and responsibilities and those duties and responsibilities go beyond merely conforming to the Rule of Law. A loyalist who believes that citizenship within the United Kingdom is worth fighting for cannot be satisfied with a view of citizenship that is simply about rights. Citizens are not simply people who are guaranteed certain rights of citizenship in return for conforming to the Rule of Law, or who receive state benefits in return for paying into the state through their taxes. Such a concept of citizenship is much too passive for the man or woman who has been willing to sacrifice his or her life or freedom in order to maintain their British citizenship.

Citizenship, for the loyalist, must be active citizenship. A true loyalist is someone who thinks and behaves and acts in a certain way as a citizen. He or she will identify with the political community to which they belong and will be committed to

promoting the common good of that community through active participation in its social and political life. That may bring them into conflict with other citizens who are sincerely seeking the common good of their political community. In a multi-cultural and multi-faith society citizens will have different, often conflicting views, about what is good for them. Active citizenship is about helping to resolve those differences through dialogue, political accommodation and compromise.

### **Citizenship and the Empire**

Our forbears believed that incorporation into an independent Irish state would be *“perilous to the unity of the Empire”*.

The British Empire no longer exists, but the unity of the peoples who made up the Empire is maintained through the Commonwealth of Nations from which the Irish Republic withdrew in 1948. Fifty-four other free and independent nations all of which, with one exception, have had past ties to a Commonwealth country remain united in a bond of political friendship and social and economic cooperation.

It is estimated that 30% of the world’s population belong to a Commonwealth country and the unionist community in Northern Ireland ought to be proud to be part of that international family. Had Ulster been incorporated into an all-Ireland Free State or Republic we would, as our forbears predicated, have been forced to withdraw from that family. The irrational hatred for all things British sets the Republic of Ireland apart from all other countries that have gained their independence from Britain. There are no valid political, cultural or economic reasons why the Republic should find it impossible to join the Commonwealth.

The criterion for membership is simple. A applicant for membership must be (1) a Sovereign nation, (2) as a rule have had a constitutional association with an existing Commonwealth member and (3) comply with Commonwealth values, principles and priorities as set out in the Harare Declaration. The Republic certainly meets the first two requirements so we must ask, “Which of the values, principles and priorities of the Commonwealth can the Republic not sign up to”? Or, as we suggest, is it more a matter of a deep-seated and irrational hatred of all things perceived to be British?

Sixteen Commonwealth countries are constitutional monarchies, thirty-three are republics and five have their own national monarchies. Some were former colonies, some were protectorates and some were trust territories and they are to be found in every continent and ocean and comprise a broad range of ethnic backgrounds, religions and cultures. The Commonwealth is truly a multi-ethnic, multi-faith and multi-cultural association of free peoples. The one thing that binds them together simply is their shared history with the United Kingdom which is manifested in the fact that they all have a common working language (English) and similar systems of law, public administration and education. This shared history has enabled them to develop a vibrant and growing association of states that are in tune with the modern world.

If countries as far away from the United Kingdom as Zambia, St. Lucia, Sri Lanka, Samoa and South Africa wish to maintain and develop the family of nations whose members have a shared history, one must ask why the Irish Republic is so antagonistic. The extent of direct family ties between people living in Great Britain and in the Irish Republic is such that one would have expected this to be reflected at political level. It is estimated that a quarter of the people in Great Britain have Irish relatives and that the links between the peoples of the two states have grown stronger since the secession of the Republic from the United Kingdom.

As one commentator has noted, “the peoples of these islands show in their everyday intercourse that they are much more like each other than either Government usually likes to admit; that over the centuries they have become, whether their politicians and bureaucrats like it or not, increasingly mingled, both ethnically and culturally”. Surely it is only pure bloody-mindedness and irrational hatred of all things British that prevents the Irish Republic from joining the Commonwealth.

Republicans constantly tell us that the only bond that binds the Commonwealth nations is the fact that they were all victims of British imperialism. They appear to be blind to the fact that the fifty-four nations that make up the Commonwealth are free and independent nations. Yes, they were once a part of the British Empire that was established as a result of British Imperialism. Yet it is precisely the positive elements of that shared history that provides the glue that binds them together. Independence has not only given these countries political freedom, it has also liberated them from any sense of victim-hood that they might have had.

British Imperialism was wrong, as was the imperialism of other Protestant nations like Holland. So too was the imperialism of Catholic nations like Spain, Belgium, France and Portugal, and the atheistic imperialism of the former Soviet Union and Communist China; not forgetting the thwarted imperialist intentions of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. So too is the allegedly benign financial imperialism of the United States of America and the World Trade Organisation. But at least Britain has sought to put things right and now enjoys amicable relationships and cooperation with the Commonwealth countries.

It is true that Ireland has never had colonies, but Irish men and women have helped to establish colonies for a number of



nations, including Britain. Indeed approximately one-third of the British Army that established the Empire was Irish and Irish people, as much as anyone else in these islands, were quite happy to use the British Empire for their own purposes. Irish Republicans who look to Theobald Wolfe Tone as the founding father of Irish Republicanism may be interested to know that Wolfe Tone lamented the fact that Ireland did not have its own colonies. He was, of course, a former British colonial officer who saw colonialism as an extension of nationalism. His republicanism was grounded in the republicanism of the French Revolution and post-revolution France developed an active colonial programme. It should be remembered too that no less a person than Arthur Griffith, founder of Sinn Fein, desired the development of a British-Irish Empire under his bizarre belief in a dual monarchy. The Catholic Church in Ireland also used the British colonial programme as a vehicle for its missionaries to develop a thoroughgoing programme of religious imperialism.

The incorporation of Northern Ireland into an independent Irish state that wilfully rejects its shared history with the United Kingdom would not only strip us of our British citizenship, it would also rob us of our fraternal links with the family of nations that make up the Commonwealth. That is not something that we are prepared to let happen.

## Principle 4

### The Use of Armed Resistance

*"We...do hereby pledge ourselves in solemn Covenant throughout this our time of threatened calamity to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland. And in the event of such a parliament being forced upon us we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognise its authority..."*

The signatories to the Solemn League and Covenant pledged that they would use "all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland". One of those "means" which Unionists thought to be necessary was the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force.

### 1912-1965

The Covenant was not signed until "Ulster Day" on the 28th September 1912, yet as early as January of that year a number of Unionist leaders had begun to raise and drill groups of volunteers. It was quite legal for a person to organise and drill volunteers provided they had applied for, and received, a license from two magistrates claiming that their intention was to prepare citizens to defend the realm against possible attack. Groups of volunteers were organised throughout the nine Ulster counties and the Ulster Unionist Council agreed to bring all of these separate groups together into one unified force and under one single Command Staff. Thus, by the end of 1912 a force of some 90,000 volunteers was being prepared to resist the imposition of Home Rule should the Imperial Parliament so decree.

The Ulster Unionist Council was quite prepared to set aside the Rule of Law in order to defend the right of the Ulster people to resist unjust political impositions. The covenanters also stated "in the event of such a parliament being forced upon us we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognise its authority". Resistance to the imposition of Home Rule would be through both armed resistance and civil disobedience. It is clear that the Ulster Unionist Council and the 450,000 people who signed the Covenant believed that the will of the people must be exercised, if necessary, outside the Rule of Law.

The philosopher Hobbes remarked that "Covenants without swords, are but words" and the establishment and arming of the Ulster Volunteer Force showed that the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant meant a lot more than mere words.

While it was lawful to organise volunteers in preparation for the defence of the realm it was clearly unlawful, indeed treasonable, to organise a volunteer force to resist the will of Parliament. Yet that is how far the British citizens of Ulster were prepared to go. In this they were following precedents set by both the Puritan Revolution of 1648 and the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89. However, the Solemn League & Covenant went beyond either of the previous revolutions. Whereas the Revolutionary Settlement of 1689 made the Monarch subject to the will of Parliament and established the Rule of Law, the Solemn League and Covenant said that the will of the Imperial Parliament was subject to the will of the people of Ulster and that the people had a right to set aside the Rule of Law in the interests of their political destiny. The fact that the Imperial Parliament agreed to exclude six of the nine Ulster counties from the Free State was an acknowledgement, however reluctantly, of the right of the people of Ulster to maintain their British citizenship and membership of the Union.

It must be said that the use of armed rebellion against the will of Parliament had not been part of Unionist strategy prior to the turn of the century. Gordon Lucy in his excellent booklet "The Great Convention" shows that the use of force was not contemplated at the great Ulster Convention of 1892 when some 12,300 delegates, representative of all shades of unionism, affirmed their opposition to Home Rule. It would appear that prior to 1912 there had been no long-standing ideological



commitment on behalf of unionists to the use of armed force. The inclusion of the words “by all means necessary” in the Covenant together the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force were, therefore, acts of will rather than of ideology. They were acts borne out of necessity. The doctrine of necessity stands behind most revolutionary projects. The great parliamentarian, Edmund Burke, himself no advocate of revolution, acknowledged that when the moment for revolution did come – as it certainly did in 1912-1914 for the people of Ulster–

“It is the first and supreme necessity only, a necessity that is not chosen but chooses, a necessity paramount to deliberation, that admits no discussion and demands no evidence, which alone can justify a resort to anarchy. This necessity is no exception to the rule, because this necessity itself is a part, too, of that moral and physical disposition of things to which man must be obedient by consent or force”.

The people of Ulster refused to consent to Home Rule and, when it appeared that their wishes were to be ignored by an intransigent government, a resort to the use of armed resistance became a necessity. The comment of Livy that “Wars are just to whom they are necessary” is applicable. The appeal to arms was well understood by the people of Ulster for whom the time of necessity had finally arrived.

When Britain entered the war the Ulster Unionist leadership set aside its differences with Parliament and pledged its support, and the support of the Ulster Volunteer Force, for the war effort. Sir Edward Carson sought, and received, an assurance that the UVF would be kept together in one Army Division and that the provisions of the Home Rule Bill would be suspended until after the war. Thus the volunteer army that was established to resist the will of Parliament formed the core of the 36th (Ulster) Division of Kitchener's army.

After the war the conflict between the Imperial Parliament and the Ulster Unionists resumed. While the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 gave Home Rule to 26 Irish counties, it exempted six of the Ulster counties. It is generally assumed that the exemption of six of the Ulster counties was a reward for Ulster's loyalty during the war and an acknowledgement of the contribution and sacrifice made by the Ulster Volunteer Force to the British war effort. This is only partly true. The exemption was also due to the political skills of the Ulster Unionist leadership and the ongoing threat of armed resistance by the Ulster Volunteer Force. In a 12th of July speech in 1920 Edward Carson warned the Government that he would call out the Ulster Volunteer Force if there was any attempt to diminish by one jot or tittle the rights of the Ulster people to full British citizenship.

While the UVF was established primarily to resist any attempt by the Imperial Parliament to impose a Home Rule Parliament on the people of Ulster, it took on a different role during 1920. Nationalists responded to the exemption of Northern Ireland from Home Rule by both passive resistance and terrorism. The anti-treaty elements of the IRA, often supported by the pro-treaty elements, began a terror campaign to force the British Government to expel Northern Ireland from the Union.

It was generally believed that the police would not be able to provide an effective defence of the unionist community and a number of leading unionists began to reorganise volunteer units. Sir Basil Brooke, who was to become one of Northern Ireland's Prime Ministers, organised volunteers in County Fermanagh while County Tyrone was organised by General Ricardo. Fred Crawford, who had organised the gunrunning project for the UVF in 1914, called for the reorganisation of the UVF in Belfast. As in 1912, the Ulster Unionist Council responded to what was going on in the country and appointed Lt. Col. William Spender to reorganise the UVF. On 23rd July 1920 advertisements were carried in unionist newspapers asking members and former members of the UVF to report for duty. By August 1920 UVF units had been reactivated in five of the six counties of Northern Ireland.

The decision to reorganise the UVF was taken for two reasons. One reason was to provide a unified armed response to IRA activity and the second was to give leadership to working class loyalists who were by now engaged in independent retaliatory violence. This included the expulsion of nationalist workers from predominantly unionist workplaces like the Belfast shipyard. These expulsions usually followed an IRA attack or street disorders. Loyalist activities in the 1920's also included assassinations.

As in 1912, the reorganised UVF enjoyed the support of all classes of unionism. As Steve Bruce has noted: -

It is worth noting the elite support for the 1920 UVF; the commanders were lords, knights, and very senior army officers. It is also worth noting that, for an entirely unofficial (and possibly illegal) organisation, the 1920 UVF had an extremely privileged relationship with the police and the army.

The need for a long-term official response to the threat of IRA violence resulted in the Unionist Government persuading the British Parliament to authorise and fund the Ulster Special Constabulary. Thus the 1920 UVF was incorporated into the Ulster Special Constabulary and loyalist resistance to the threat of IRA activity was legalised. Loyalist responses to IRA campaigns in the 30's, 40's, 50's and 60's were through the RUC and the Ulster Special Constabulary.

## 1965-1970

The UVF was reformed again in 1965 by concerned members of the Ulster Unionist Party who opposed the liberalism of Terence O'Neill, then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. The status of those unionists responsible for reconstituting the UVF in 1965 has been the subject of much debate. According to the journalist-author, Martin Dillon, the UVF was reformed by three prominent members of the Unionist Party. Roy Garland, in "The Ulster Volunteer Force: Negotiating History", claims that Gusty Spence was recruited into the reformed UVF by "two men, one of them a Unionist politician" and that Spence was sworn in to the UVF by an ex-British Army Colonel. Steve Bruce dismisses the idea that there was any elite Unionist involvement in the re-formation of the UVF and suggests that "The early paramilitaries may have been supported by an isolated Tyrone farmer of some substance, but they were essentially a self-recruiting, working-class movement".

Spence's claim that he was recruited into the UVF by persons who were well placed within the Ulster Unionist Party has a ring of truth. Who those persons were and what the position they held within the Ulster Unionist Party are details that Spence is not likely to divulge. All who know him know that he regards his word as his bond and that he would sooner die than break a confidence.

It must be stated too that the UVF was reactivated in 1965, not just to combat any possible threat from the IRA, which had ended its last campaign in 1962, but also to combat the liberalising policies of the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Captain Terence O'Neill. There were elements within the Ulster Unionist Party – indeed within the Government – that wanted to undermine O'Neill and frustrate what they regarded as his programme of appeasement. In June 1966 the UVF send a telegram to Terence O'Neill stating that it had no longer any confidence in his leadership. In an interview with Roy Garland, Gusty Spence confirms that the UVF was reactivated in 1965 primarily as a response to the policies of Terence O'Neill. According to Spence, "the UVF was reconstituted to oppose or be used as a bargaining counter against some of the things O'Neill had brought into debate" and that "members of O'Neill's own party set up the UVF".

While the threat from the IRA appeared to be minimal in 1965 – the last campaign had ended in 1962 – elements within unionism were successful in portraying a picture of IRA intentions that were grossly exaggerated. I remember being told that the police had evidence that the IRA intended to take over the town of Newry during the 1966 Easter Rising commemorations and emulate the stand taken by Connolly and Pearce at the GPO in 1916. The IRA's intention, we were told, was to make an armed-stand and call for United Nations intervention. Gusty Spence recalls that some unionists also believed that the IRA in Belfast intended to take over the City Hall and that this resulted in an RUC guard being posted.

There was also a widespread belief, whipped up by hard-line unionists that the IRA intended to use the 1966 Easter Rising Commemorations to orchestrate civil disturbances in Belfast and Londonderry. Preparations for the Easter Rising Commemorations appeared to confirm that something was happening within nationalist areas. Both the political climate and the stories about the alleged intentions of the IRA in 1966 ensured that the time was ripe for the reconstitution of the UVF.

It must be said too that not all involved in the UVF in 1965 were committed to physical force. Roy Garland recalls being told by a loyalist from County Down that he "knew 'respectable' members of a rural organisation who called themselves the UVF but they were quite different from the UVF men on the Shankill". Garland goes on to say that Gusty Spence agreed that some of those involved in the UVF in 1965 were middle class unionists who "were not physical force men, but were holding themselves in readiness for a doomsday-type situation". Another loyalist veteran told me that he personally met quite a number of individuals in the late sixties who claimed to be in UVF units that had been set up to support the police and "B" Specials in the event of a doomsday-situation.

## 1970 - 1994

Contrary to uniformed opinion at the time, the UVF did not cease to exist between the arrest and conviction of Gusty Spence in 1966 and the outbreak of the 'troubles' in 1969. Whoever may have been behind the reconstitution of the UVF in 1965 it is clear than when the "troubles" broke out again in 1969 there was no clear leadership given to the UVF by the Ulster Unionist Party, or by any other party. The UVF developed during the seventies, to use the words of Steve Bruce, as "a self-recruiting, working class movement".

Unlike the Ulster Unionist leaders of 1912 and 1920, and even 1965, who were prepared to go outside the law and give leadership to the UVF, the leaders of Unionism during the past thirty years have only been prepared to incite men and women to organise; they have never put themselves forward as either Officers or Volunteers. For many of us the "doomsday situation" arrived in 1969 and, certainly by the end of 1970, few within unionism believed that the IRA had not been involved in exploiting the civil disturbances of 1969 and 1970. Small units of loyalists, hitherto unconnected and lying dormant, became active and began to forge links and a central command structure was established. Numbers increased as recruitment, which was by way of invitation, began in earnest and by the end of 1970 the modern UVF had emerged.

Resistance to republican activity was not limited to the UVF and other paramilitary organisations. Many loyalists, particularly

those living in rural areas, chose to serve in the legally constituted security forces. Both mainstream political unionism and civic unionism have generally supported the legal security forces and condemned illegal paramilitary organisations. This was the only valid option for those unionists who believed that armed republicanism should be resisted within the Rule of Law. Those who opted to resist through the ranks of the UVF believed that effective resistance within the Rule of Law was impossible. As far as the UVF was concerned, the IRA was at war with the people of Northern Ireland and that "in time of war the law is silent". As Werner Jaeger has pointed out, "the principle of force forms a realm of its own, with laws of its own" and these laws are distinct and separate from the Rule of Law and the laws of moral life.

The nature of the war waged by the IRA against the people of Northern Ireland was not conventional and could not be countered by means of conventional warfare. The type of conflict required to respond to IRA terrorism is unpalatable to the sensitivities of civic society. Colin Crawford, in his book "Defenders or Criminals" notes that "The UVF had within its ranks volunteers who, as former British soldiers in Cyprus, Borneo and Malaya, knew only too well the limitations of conventional forces in combating terrorism. They had been involved in carrying out covert counter-terrorist measures, including 'dirty tricks', as they were known". Ex-service personnel who joined the UVF in the early days of the conflict knew that republican terror could not be effectively addressed through conventional warfare or under the Rule of Law. A strategy of counter terrorism was both called for and adopted.

Other elements within political and civic unionism did see a place for paramilitary activity that was purely defensive. Peter Taylor, in his book "Loyalists" quotes Gregory Campbell of the Democratic Unionist party as making a distinction between organisations like the UVF, RHC and UFF, of which he disapproves, and Ulster Resistance which he describes as "a sort of clean living paramilitary group that would be purely defensive and wouldn't single out innocent Catholics for murder".

Campbell more or less sums up the attitude of mainstream political unionism and civic unionism. They believed in armed resistance but they wanted it done either legally by the security forces or, if that proved too difficult due to political interference from Westminster, by "a sort of clean living paramilitary group". They want our soldiers and our policemen to do their killing for them so long as they do it 'cleanly' and 'within the law', or if outside the law, so long as the clean-living paramilitaries can do it cleanly for defensive purposes. They wanted their paramilitaries, if they had to have them, to operate within the sensitivities of civic society and within the boundaries of conventional warfare. But that is not the way the world of terrorism and counter-terrorism works.

The modern UVF operated outside those parameters because the nature of the conflict dictated by the IRA could not be responded to effectively within the Rule of Law or within the sensitivities of civic society.

While the leaders of political and civic unionism have generally disassociated themselves from the UVF it must be said that certain of their number have made calls for the establishment of irregular loyalist militias during the past thirty years and have used the threat of a loyalist paramilitary backlash as a political bargaining chip. It should also be noted that there have been times when the wider community has supported loyalist violence. Anthony Alcock refers to a telephone poll of some 4000 people undertaken by the Newsletter in the Spring of 1993 which showed that 42% declared their support for paramilitary violence, 50.2% answered "yes" to the question as to whether there were current circumstances in which loyalist paramilitary violence was justified, and 81% stated that loyalist violence was a reaction to PIRA violence and would cease if the PIRA called off its campaign.

Alcock, who would most certainly not support loyalist violence, admits that while telephone polls are not conducted on a scientific basis and will not always reflect the views of the community as a whole nevertheless he believed that the poll did provide a reliable barometer of the views of the loyalist community. Alcock also referred to a Gallop Poll conducted in August 1993, which showed that 76% of those polled believed that taking the law into your own hands was justified.

Roy Garland, in his booklet "The Ulster Volunteer Force: Negotiating History", reminds us that mainstream unionist politicians, while disassociating themselves from loyalist violence, had not always been advocates of moderation. Garland takes the year 1972, the year which saw the highest number of deaths during the conflict, and cites a series of quotations from the Sunday News in which politicians used such language as "We'll liquidate the enemy if politicians fail" (19.3.72); "We'll use force if need be" (9.4.72); "Loyalists can no longer stand idly by" (11.6.72); "We have a loyalist army" (2.7.72). He refers to a quote attributed by the paper to John Taylor MP who is said to have warned "the people of Northern Ireland would rise up even in the face of the might of Britain if they were pushed too far" (24.9.72).

Such public statements, while not the reason for the existence of loyalist paramilitary organisations, certainly encouraged young men to enlist with organisations like the UVF, RHC and UFF. Excuses made in later years to try and tone down such statements have never been convincing. They knew what they were saying and we knew what they were saying.

Some twenty-eight years later Peter Taylor, in his book "Loyalists", quotes John Taylor, as saying, "The loyalist paramilitaries achieved something which perhaps the security forces would never have achieved, and that was they were a significant contribution to the IRA finally accepting that they couldn't win". Many loyalists would agree with that statement.

## **1994 - Present Day**

The Ulster Volunteer Force and Red Hand Commando called a ceasefire on 14th October 1994. Both organisations believed then, and continue to believe, that the cessation of armed hostilities by mainstream republicanism should be matched by a cessation of loyalist hostilities.

One of the key considerations that led the UVF/RHC leadership to endorse the 1994 cessation was a belief that the Republican Movement was questioning its continued commitment to the "armed struggle" and that a republican cessation required a measured response from loyalists. A second consideration was an acceptance by the UVF/RHC leadership that Her Majesty's Government had not entered into an agreement with the Republican Movement and/or the wider republican-nationalist constituency to impose a political settlement on the people of Northern Ireland that weakened the Union or the democratic structures through which the people of Northern Ireland could determine their own political and constitutional destiny.

In the absence of republican violence the UVF/RHC leadership has seen its role as monitoring the military activity of both the Republican Movement and so-called republican dissidents. Until there is a clear and unequivocal declaration that the "war is over" the leadership of the UVF/RHC believes there is a need for it to keep a watching brief on republican activity. Both organisations will also continue to monitor the political situation to ensure that no political or constitutional settlement is imposed by either Her Majesty's Government alone, or in collaboration with the Government of the Irish Republic, that would weaken either the Union or the democratic structures through which the people of Northern Ireland can determine their own destiny.

The military structure of the Ulster Volunteer Force and Red Hand Commando will remain in place so long as a return to the "armed struggle" by mainstream republicanism, an escalation of dissident republican activity, or the threat of an imposed solution remains a possibility. Having said that, both organisations believe that the issue of decommissioning and the possible demilitarisation of organisational structures are issues that must be honestly addressed. To this end both organisations have co-operated fully with the De Chastelain Commission. Both organisations believe that the issues of decommissioning and demilitarisation can best be addressed within the context of a genuine process of dialogue, trust and mutual respect being developed within and across our divided communities.

Even in the event of such a process being engaged in, and achieving a measure of success, the process towards decommissioning and demilitarisation will be slow, measured and drawn out. To this end the UVF/RHC supports and encourages those former members and ex-prisoners who are engaged in inter-community development, political dialogue and conflict transformation programmes.

The rise in criminal activity and other socially harmful activities following the cease-fires has been a cause for concern. The leadership of the UVF/RHC do not wish to see their organisations take on the role of an informal 'community police' force and believe that these issues must be resolved by local communities working together with the statutory and voluntary sector organisations, and the police. Both organisations endorse community safety programmes and restorative justice initiatives so long as they are genuinely representative of the community and have credible statutory sector support.

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

## **The 1969 - 1994 Conflict**

### **Visible and Invisible Armies**

The armed protagonists involved in the 1969-1994 conflict may be categorised as follows: - The State Security Forces, The Anti-State Republicans and the Pro-State Loyalists. Only one of these forces, the State Security Forces, functioned generally as a conventional army. Police and Army personnel wore easily identifiable uniforms, carried their arms openly and regularly carried out predictable foot and mobile patrols on the streets of our towns and villages. In carrying out its military campaign against the Security Forces the IRA had a clearly identified enemy with which to engage. Identification and targeting of the enemy was fairly simple for IRA activists.

While both RUC and Army personnel carried weapons, such was the nature of the attacks launched against them that they seldom had the time or the opportunity to use them. Long range sniping, ambush, booby traps and culvert bombs are a form of attack that gives supreme advantage with minimal risk to the attacker. The campaign against off-duty policemen and part-



time members of the UDR/RIR and RUC Reserve followed a similar pattern. Booby traps, ambush and sniping. The IRA always had the advantage under such circumstances.

It must be said that the use of ambush is a feature of both conventional warfare as well as unconventional warfare, yet republicans would deny the right of the Security Forces to engage in ambush and, indeed, it would appear that the European Courts and human rights activists supported the republican position. A form of ambush that is not accepted as being legitimate in any kind of warfare is that of an ambush being carried out behind political or moral cover rather than natural cover. The IRA tactics of faking traffic accidents, burglaries and other 'non-military' incidents in order to lure the police and army into an ambush is not a generally accepted form of ambush. Such tactics were exploited by the IRA to give their activists additional advantage over the Security Forces. By insisting that the Security Forces responded to IRA violence within the Rule of Law both the Government and the European Courts indicated their acceptance of the republican/nationalist argument that the rules of engagement must always favour the IRA and other anti-state groups.

The Security Forces had no similar enemy to attack. The IRA did not wear easily recognisable uniforms and did not operate foot patrols or tour the streets of our cities and villages in easily identifiable vehicles. If they had, they would have been subjected to the same method of warfare as they employed against both the Army and Police. The IRA never put itself in a position where its members could be ambushed while out on patrol and in those few instances where the Security Forces did lay down an ambush they were quickly condemned and calls for international inquiries were demanded by republicans, nationalists and 'liberal' lobbyists.

Pro-state organisations like the UVF have been condemned for not conducting an open military campaign against the IRA. But how do you conduct an open campaign against an enemy that refuses to identify itself? There were no IRA patrols to ambush, no uniformed Sinn Fein police to lure into traps with bogus calls and no IRA barracks to mortar bomb. The title of J. Bowyer Bell's book, "The Secret Army", adequately sums up the nature of the IRA. By adopting the military strategy of secreting itself within the nationalist community and using that community as its political and moral cover, the IRA invited reprisal attacks against the nationalist community.

Neither the anti-state republicans, nor the pro-state loyalist paramilitaries, functioned as conventional guerrilla armies. They did not wear easily recognisable insignia or carry their arms openly nor did they take any other measures to distinguish themselves from the civilian members of their respective communities. In this they differed from the old Irish Volunteers/Irish Citizens Army and the original Ulster Volunteer Force, both of which ensured that their volunteers wore recognisable insignia and carried their arms openly. While both would dispute the designation "terrorist" it is clear from the tactics employed by both during the 1969-1994 conflict that they functioned as terrorist organisations.

The use of terror tactics in conflict has never been restricted to 'terrorist' organisations. The "Baedeker Raids" carried out by the German Air Force against non-military targets, the "carpet bombing" of German towns by the RAF Bomber Command under Arthur "Bomber" Harris and the total destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States Air Force were all designed to terrorise the enemy. All were directed against civilian targets by the conventional armed forces of national governments. When people talk about "terror" and "terrorism" we need to remind ourselves that democratically elected governments and their armed forces are just as likely to engage in terror tactics, as are anti-state or pro-state paramilitaries.

### **The IRA Campaign**

The IRA's campaign to force the British Government to expel the Unionist population from the United Kingdom was not just directed against the Army and Police. It also included the indiscriminate killing of civilians (both Protestant and Catholic) by car bombs and hit and run gun attacks together with the selective assassination of politicians, business people, so-called collaborators and a variety of other individuals including the only sons of Protestant farmers and property owners in border areas.

The campaign also included bombing the centre of predominately Protestant towns and villages and the bombing of Protestant streets and housing estates. Republicans claim that all car bombs were directed at military or economic targets and that any civilians killed were, regrettably, the casualties of war. The truth of the matter is that such attacks were directed at weakening the resolve of the unionist community in its determination to remain British. A look at maps outlining the route taken by bombers to reach 'economic' targets in predominately protestant areas will show just how many 'economic' targets were by-passed enroute through predominately nationalist areas

Following the appointment of Sean MacStiofain as Chief of Staff of the Provisional Army Council the IRA openly declared its intention to include the unionist civilian community in its list of legitimate targets. On 29th September 1971 an IRA unit left a bomb, estimated to contain 150 pounds of explosives in the hallway of the crowded Four Step Inn on Belfast's Shankill Road. The device exploded without warning collapsing the ceiling of the lounge bar onto the customers. Twenty-seven people were injured and two men were killed. One of the men killed was so badly mutilated that he could only be identified by his clothing. The UVF was quick to adopt the IRA strategy and the "no warning" bombing of civilian targets became part of its



strategy as well.

Some six months later the IRA introduced yet another vehicle for terror when in March 1972 it introduced the “car bomb” as a new weapon in its war against the unionist community. A car packed with a hundred pounds of explosives was detonated in Donegall Street killing seven people. The target was neither military nor economic; the attack was aimed at ordinary people going about their daily business, and was to be the first of many similar attacks on civilian targets. If the business community in Donegall Street had been the primary target, with the object of putting companies out of business and causing the British exchequer to pay out large sums of compensation, this could have been achieved by a bomb attack in the quiet early hours of the morning without loss of life. That it was carried out when the businesses were open and the streets were full of people is evidence that the object was not purely economic. This applies to all such attacks. Economics may have been a factor but the primary objective was to instil terror and fear through multiple deaths and injuries.

Republicans claim that their war was against the British administration not the unionist people. The fact of the matter is that the British administration is only here because the unionist people want it to be here. The real British presence in Ireland are those of us who cherish our British citizenship. Consequently the real focus, if not always the direct physical target, of republican violence is the unionist community. The British government will only honour Northern Ireland’s position as an integral part of the United Kingdom so long as that is the expressed wish of the people of Northern Ireland. Thus, the real opponent of the republican objective of a United Ireland is the unionist community, not the British administration. Notwithstanding the rhetoric used by republicans about British imperialism being the current obstacle to a United Ireland, they know exactly who the British presence in Ireland really is, and they know that to break the unionist veto on a United Ireland they need to break the will of the unionist people, not the will of the British government. That is exactly what unionists believe they intended to do. No amount of debate will convince unionists that the republican campaign was not directed against them.

If the terms “unionist” and “protestant” are to be regarded as synonymous, then the republican campaign was an anti-protestant campaign – thus in Northern Ireland parlance, it was a sectarian campaign. If attacking a nationalist is to be regarded as sectarian because the terms “nationalist” and “Catholic” are regarded as being the same thing, then by the same token attacking a unionist must be regarded as sectarian.

Republican violence was aimed at making the continued link with the rest of the United Kingdom more oppressive for unionists than any fears they may have had about an oppressive life in a United Ireland. What republicans regarded as the armed struggle against British imperialism, unionists regarded as a campaign of terror against them. Even the campaign against the RUC and the British army was regarded by unionists as a campaign against them. Republicans may tell us that they merely attack a “uniform” which they regard as the symbol of British repression. Unionists look at the “uniform” and see a British citizen – one of our people – who has been tasked to protect them against republican aggression. Whereas republicans dehumanise the policeman or the soldier, reducing them to mere impersonal objects, unionists humanise them and relate to them as living beings and fellow citizens.

This was more keenly felt by unionists following the “Ulsterisation” of the security forces when members of the RUC and UDR became primary targets. Commenting on the effect of Ulsterisation on both the IRA and the unionist community, Peter Hadden of the Socialist Party, said that this meant that “the British army was a less achievable target. It also meant that, whether they liked it or not, the IRA’s campaign more and more was targeting Protestants, those in the RUC and RIR, or those who built their bases and supplied them. It was increasingly a campaign against local Protestants not against British soldiers”.

### **The UVF Campaign**

The one element of republican strategy that loyalists could replicate with effect was the strategy of placing the “enemy” community in an oppressive situation. The UVF regarded the conflict as a conflict between the nationalist and the unionist communities. The IRA was simply a physical force component of a wider opposing force. The IRA was conducting its campaign of terror for, and on behalf of, the nationalist community. The nationalist community provided the foot soldiers, the financial support, the safe operating environment and the moral support for the IRA. It also willingly accepted any political gains that were obtained as a result of republican violence. In nationalist areas west of the River Bann it is generally the so-called moderate nationalists who benefit most when Protestants are expelled from their homes and farms by the IRA.

The nationalist community was, in the eyes of the UVF, culpable. It was the enemy that stood behind the IRA’s campaign of terror and it was the only visible enemy that could be targeted. Many UVF volunteers did not believe that there was any real difference between physical force republicanism and constitutional nationalism. They may

use different methods and may reject each other's methods, but they share the one core objective – the incorporation of Ulster unionists into Catholic Nationalist State - and they share the spoils of war. In the eyes of the ordinary volunteer the nationalist civilian stood in the same relationship to the IRA as the German civilian stood in relation to the German military during the allied bombing of German cities or in which the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki stood in relation to the Imperial Japanese Army.

The UVF has never sought to hide the fact that its campaign was aimed at subjecting the nationalist community to a level of violence that would instil fear and terror in members of that community. Many volunteers believed that there was a price to be paid for the IRA's campaign of terror and that price was being paid by the community that gave birth to, and nurtured, the IRA. It was a harsh and ruthless strategy that was dictated by the nature of the conflict. It dehumanised members of the nationalist community and reduced them to the status of scapegoats who were forced to suffer vicariously for the sins of its "secret army". There is no way that that strategy can be dressed up in fancy military terms to make something that was horrible look good. The objective was simple – subject the nationalist community to an oppressive force of violence as retribution for republican violence.

One of the weapons used by the UVF in its campaign against the nationalist community was the placing of no-warning bombs outside and inside premises in nationalist areas. The Provisional IRA first introduced this tactic to the conflict and its adoption by the UVF was seen by many volunteers as "returning the serve". Commercial explosives, and the materials to manufacture home-made explosives, were fairly easy to procure. Thus it was relatively easy for the UVF to "return the serve" and there was a period in the early seventies when the UVF engaged in a sustained bombing campaign against the nationalist community with devastating results in terms of human suffering. Unlike the IRA, the UVF made no pretences that its bombing campaign was against military and economic targets. The IRA had no military barracks or mobile patrols to attack with bombs and land mines, nor did they have any significant economic targets to bomb. But, like the unionist communities that they regularly targeted, their communities had places where their members and supporters socialised. Pubs and clubs in nationalist communities became targets for the UVF just as the Four Step Inn, Bayardo Bar and the Mountainview Tavern were targets for IRA bombers.

The UVF bombing campaign was also directed at targets outside of Northern Ireland. The UVF has publicly claimed that it was responsible for the Dublin and Monaghan bombs in May 1975 which claimed the lives of thirty-two people. It is widely believed within loyalism that the motive behind these bombs was to let the Irish Government and the people of the republic know what the unionist community was suffering in their name at the hands of the IRA. A "Chronology of the Conflict" for 1975 implicates the Red Hand Commando, a group affiliated to the UVF, in the bombing of Kay's Tavern in Dundalk just across the border in County Louth. The RHC were also deemed to have been involved in a bomb and gun attack on the Silverbridge Inn near Crossmaglen in the IRA heartland of South Armagh on the same day.

Another key tactic employed by the UVF and RHC as a means of generating fear and terror within the nationalist community was the random assassination of nationalists. While the first nationalist ever killed by the UVF (in 1970) was a member of the IRA, and other members were killed in the years that followed, statistics clearly show that the vast majority of nationalists shot by the UVF and RHC were ordinary members of the nationalist community, not republican terrorists. However as time passed and members of the IRA and other terror groups were identified through either the prison experience or the supergrass trials, it was possible to target members of the Secret Army and their political confidantes.

A key priority for the UVF and RHC in the early seventies was to procure weapons that could match the firepower of the IRA. Firearms were not as easy to obtain as explosives and loyalists did not have a history of weapons procurement. In the early days weapons were procured from wherever they could be found – from policemen, soldiers, arms dealers. The most successful of the early weapons' procurement operations was when over 100 small arms, including self-loading rifles and sterling sub-machine guns, were 'liberated' in a raid by the UVF on a security base in Lurgan. The UVF was also successful in 'liberating' a substantial quantity of weapons during a raid on the government forensic science laboratory. As time went on weapons were procured from arms dealers and supporters in Canada, Europe, Lebanon and South Africa. According to Peter Taylor, "Canada had been the UVF's main source of arms, supplying loyalists with around a hundred submachine guns, a hundred rifles and thousands of rounds of ammunition". Not all arms' procurements were successful, in 1986 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police uncovered one of the UVF's supply routes and in 1993 a substantial shipment of weapons and explosives procured for the UVF in Poland was uncovered by customs officials at Teesport on the north-east coast of England. It is clear however that these setbacks did not stop the flow of arms to the UVF and RHC and both organisations were able to maintain an effective armed capability.

Success in the procurement of arms enabled the UVF and RHC to complement its bombing campaign with armed attacks on the nationalist community. While the nationalist community in general was the main target, where members of republican groups were identified and accessible they were attacked. The UVF has claimed responsibility for the assassination of a number of individuals whom it believes were active within both the IRA and IPLO. These are said to include individuals whom the UVF believed were former Officers Commanding IRA units in South Derry, South Armagh, North Armagh, and the Markets and Falls areas of Belfast. UVF and RHC units also crossed the border in search of those whom they believed were involved in IRA activity. In one such operation a UVF unit tracked down and killed prison escapee, John Francis Green, at a farmhouse in Tullynageer, near Castleblayney, County Monaghan. In May 1976 the Sunday World newspaper claimed that "Both Official and Provisional Sinn Fein members living along the Border in County Louth (were) extremely worried about cross-Border incursions by both the U.V.F. and the S.A.S." The paper also claimed that "The U.V.F. are known to have highly accurate intelligence files on republicans in the Dundalk area".

According to the journalist, Peter Taylor, "In the critical four years between 1989 and 1993, the UVF and UFF killed twenty-six members of the IRA and Sinn Fein and relatives of republican families". Sutton's "Index of Deaths From the Conflict in Ireland" attributes fifteen of the killings listed by Taylor to the UVF. These include three members of an IRA unit killed at Cappagh in the republican heartland of East Tyrone and a republican activist whom the UVF believed to be a major IRA gun runner based in the Mid Ulster area. Other key republican figures killed by the UVF included Martin Doherty, shot during an attack on a bar in Dublin, and Larry Marley whom Peter Taylor claims was "a close friend of Gerry Adams and a leading IRA man in Ardoyne". The UVF believe that Doherty was a member of PIRA's GHQ staff. The UVF has also claimed that it was responsible for the killing of former Sinn Fein Vice President, Maire Drumm.

In the year leading up to the IRA ceasefire in 1994 loyalist paramilitaries killed more people than the IRA and it was becoming clear that the loyalist strategy of terrorising the nationalist community was having an effect. Loyalist terror may not in itself have been responsible for convincing the nationalist community that it's Secret Army could not bomb the unionist community into United Ireland, but it did show that the price to pay for continued IRA activity was going to be a dear one; more importantly, it showed that there were going to be no winners. In an interview with Peter Taylor, the former Ulster Unionist M.P, John Taylor is reported as saying –

"Indeed in the year before the ceasefire by the IRA the loyalist paramilitaries had killed more people that year than the IRA. So I think this got a message over to the IRA that no longer were they just going to be the one and only terrorist organisation. There was a comparable one now on the loyalist side which was actually being more effective, and I think that would help people realise that there is going to be no victory in terrorism. Paramilitary killings are not going to win the day in Northern Ireland."

Neither the republican "armed struggle" nor the loyalist response was going to gain a victory. There had to be another way.

### **Civil War or War of Liberation?**

Loyalists have never accepted the argument that the IRA campaign was a war of national liberation in which the main protagonists were the Irish people and the British State. The 1969-1974 conflict was a conflict between two peoples living side by side in Northern Ireland, not a conflict between one indigenous people and a foreign state. Loyalists regarded the republican campaign as a campaign against the unionist people and they regarded their campaign as a campaign against the nationalist people. It was a civil war, albeit an unconventional one, in which the main protagonists were the unionist and the nationalist communities, and in which the majority of casualties were civilians.

It is significant that, notwithstanding republican claims that they did not target civilians, the number of civilians killed by republicans is very similar to that killed by loyalists. During the period 1969-2001 the various republican organisations were responsible for 686 civilian deaths while loyalist organisations were responsible for 729 civilian deaths. In the same period republican groups were responsible for the death of 45 loyalist paramilitaries and 9 unionist and loyalist political activists, and loyalists were responsible for the death of 42 republican paramilitaries and 31 nationalist or republican political activists. Of the 363 killings attributed to the Security Forces in the same period, 192 were civilians. By any accounting standards it is impossible to escape the fact that civilians bore the brunt of the conflict and that republicans were as active in killing civilians as loyalists were. When one considers that thousands and thousands of civilians were injured and maimed during that period one begins to really

appreciate the fact that this was a civil war – not a war of national liberation.

It has been said that the main difference between republican and loyalist activity was that loyalists deliberately targeted nationalist civilians whereas the civilian victims of republican activity were killed unintentionally. That argument, used by republicans to distance themselves from the charge of sectarianism, has been accepted by many within the nationalist community as well as by academics and political commentators. The argument is spurious. The IRA bombing campaign was aimed at subjecting the unionist community to a reign of terror and at weakening the economic infrastructure that was mainly in the hands of the unionist community. Unionist civilians were as much the targets of the bombers as the buildings they worked in. Even if commercial property was the core target of the bombers the IRA was quite willing to accept the fact that unionist civilians would most likely be killed or injured and could be written off as collateral damage. To write off unionist workers, shoppers and passers-by as mere collateral damage was just as callous and sectarian as the random targeting of individual civilians by loyalists. It is also clear that in many cases civilians were deliberately targeted – The Abercorn Restaurant, La Mon Hotel, Balmoral Furniture Showroom, Teebane, The Four Step Inn, The Bayardo Bar, The Mountain View Tavern, Enniskillen Remembrance Day Bombing, to name a few. Besides those civilians targeted in sectarian bomb attacks, republicans also engaged in sectarian shootings. Sutton's "Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland" identifies some 155 killings carried out by republicans, which were purely sectarian in nature.

When journalists, politicians and academics accept the IRA argument that its campaign was morally different from that of the loyalist campaign they are, in fact, endorsing the belief that it was morally acceptable to write off unionist civilian casualties as mere collateral damage in an otherwise legitimate war of liberation. That is probably more disgusting than the actions and intentions of those who actually planned and carried out the attacks.

As mentioned earlier, neither the UVF nor the RHC have tried to hide the fact that the targeting of nationalists was part of their strategy. In that, they are being more honest than republicans are. It must be said, too, that throughout the course of the conflict various voices were raised within UVF and RHC circles against sectarian killings. An article in the "Orange Cross" magazine in July 1975 roundly condemned sectarian killings in the following words, "To those people perpetrating these heinous crimes we appeal to you to stop now. The Loyalist people do not want it and they do not condone or support the men carrying it out". The article went on to stress, "It is not a crime to be a Roman Catholic". The "Orange Cross" was closely associated with the family of Gusty Spence and was well respected within UVF and RHC circles. A few years earlier in 1972 the UVF issued a statement in which it claimed "sectarianism plays no part in our policy". However it is clear from history that not all within the UVF and RHC agreed or heeded such statements.

The tension between those who rejected sectarian killings and those who regarded nationalist civilians as legitimate targets for reprisal has always been there within the UVF and RHC. Slowly but surely the influence of those who reject sectarianism has increased and the senior and middle management of both organisations appear to have embraced and endorsed a policy of non-sectarianism. The ceasefire statement, in which loyalists offered "abject and true remorse" to the loved ones of all innocent victims of their campaign, was both an acknowledgement that they targeted nationalist civilians and that nothing they could say or do afterwards could "compensate for the intolerable suffering" that they caused. Notwithstanding the statement from the IRA Army Council apologising for the deaths of non-combatants accidentally killed on Bloody Friday, republicans remain in denial about the sectarian nature of their campaign. The apology for Bloody Friday is meaningless given the fact that the bombs were deliberately planted in places frequented by civilians, not combatants, resulting in the death and injury of civilians by design and not by accident.

If we are to avoid going back to a war in which civilians from both communities are going to be the prime sufferers we need to memorise the following words from the statement read out at the declaration of the loyalist cease-fires in October 1994: -

"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".

Until such times as the appropriate structures are put in place that allow all parties to the conflict to make the sentiments of that statement a reality, calls for disarmament and demobilisation are unrealistic. The process that leads to decommissioning and demobilisation must take place in tandem with the development of genuine trust and mutual respect between the several parties formerly engaged in the conflict. It is important too that this trust and respect has had time to percolate down to the ordinary members of both the nationalist and the unionist communities so as to alleviate any lingering fears and suspicions about each others long-term intentions. Both the UVF and the RHC have a positive role to play in the process of building trust within and across our divided communities. Indeed, without them, the process will fail. Collaboration with the



PUP in the development of a strategic programme of unarmed resistance would be one positive method of taking that process forward.

## **The UVF and Political Resistance**

### **Introduction**

A young volunteer once said to Billy Hutchinson, "I didn't join the UVF to get involved in politics", to which Billy replied, "Neither did I, but here I am, an elected representative". It could have been pointed out to the young person that by joining the UVF he had already engaged in a political act. The UVF was originally established by political leaders for political ends and the reconstitution of the UVF in both 1920 and 1965 was at the behest of politicians for political reasons. Those political reasons are clearly set out in the Solemn League and Covenant.

The Ulster Unionist Party and the original UVF were inextricably linked, the former being responsible for the political defence of the Union and the latter for the physical defence of the Union. When mainstream Unionism turned its back on the modern UVF a number of volunteers decided to develop their own political voice. From uncertain and frustrating beginnings as far back as 1972 until the development of the Progressive Unionist Party and the election of former volunteers to public office, that political voice has grown progressively stronger.

### **The Volunteer Political Party**

During late 1972 a number of key figures within the UVF began to engage in dialogue with members of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. One of the NILP members was the late Rev John Stewart, then minister of Woodvale Methodist Church in the Greater Shankill area. Rev Stewart met regularly with senior members of the UVF during the next few years and encouraged them to think in terms of bread and butter politics as well as the constitutional issue. He also encouraged them to respond to republicanism through non-violence and dialogue. A number of the UVF members who met with Stewart had a labour or trade union background and were open to both the working class politics and to the moderate unionism that he espoused.

Hugh Smyth, an Independent Unionist, was another person who encouraged members and associates of the UVF and RHC to think politically and to try and develop their own political line of thought on local issues. Like John Stewart, Hugh was from a working class background and espoused traditional labour politics. He was elected to the power-sharing Northern Ireland Assembly as one of the West Belfast representatives and to Belfast City Council. Hugh Smyth is one of the longest serving members of the City Council and has served one term as Lord Mayor. He helped form the Progressive Unionist Party of which he is President.

The influence of both John Stewart and Hugh Smyth did have an impact on the leadership of the UVF. In early 1974 I spoke at a press conference during which I outlined some of the thinking within the UVF leadership at that time. Peter Taylor was one of the journalists who attended that press conference and recorded my comments. Some of these were as follows: -

We want to see peace but we want peace that will satisfy both the Ulster Protestants and the Irish nationalists. Some solution will have to be worked out between what the media call 'the men of violence'. The politicians can never give us peace. The men who pull the triggers are the only ones who can take their fingers off the triggers. The Provisionals will have to accept the fact that the Protestant people of Northern Ireland will not give up their Protestant liberties. Our objection is to the Provisional IRA and their supporters who are trying to take away our liberties and our traditional way of life at the point of a gun.

Taylor recorded another interview with me, this time in 1999 when he was researching his book "Loyalists", during which I reflected back on what was happening at the time of the 1997 press conference. He records me as saying: -

By the end of 1973 it (the war) had been going on for about four years and a lot of us were saying, "When is this going to end? Are we going to fight for ever?" There was a feeling that there had to be some sort of resolution. We knew nothing about conflict resolution. We didn't even know the term. But we knew there had to be a different way, that we couldn't go on sending people out to blow up pubs or to go out and shoot people – and at the same time see our pubs and shops being blown up and our people shot. We felt perhaps ... we could engage politically and maybe even ourselves come up with some political thoughts. We just felt that continued acts of violence weren't taking us anywhere".

In early 1974 I was one of a number of senior UVF members who were asked by Brigade Staff to engage in dialogue with both the Official and Provisional wings of the republican movement. The talks did not come to anything. It was too much too soon for the majority of our people. It was to take a further twenty years of violence before the time was ripe.

Following the success of the Ulster Workers Strike in May 1974 the UVF announced the establishment of the Volunteer



Political Party. The UVF circularised its membership explaining why it was forming the VPP and asked its members to put forward their views as to which policies it should formulate and adopt. An article in the UVF magazine, *Combat*, said that the UVF wanted the VPP to embrace all shades of opinion within the organisation and asked all interested members to submit their proposals to the Political executive of the organisation.

The development of the VPP was too much too soon for the bulk of the UVF and RHC. The majority of the volunteers felt that their task was to engage in the armed response to republican violence and that politics was best left to the politicians. Not even the sight of Ken Gibson in full UVF uniform standing on the steps of Stormont side by side with the leaders of Unionism persuaded them that it was the UVF's role to engage in politics. As Roy Garland has pointed out, "The decision (to form the VPP) was not universally popular and Spence felt that its possible failure would only strengthen the hands of the more military-oriented Volunteers". That failure came, first, when the United Ulster Unionist Council rejected an application from the VPP for affiliation and, second, when Ken Gibson stood as a VPP candidate the 1974 Westminster elections as polled a mere 2690 votes.

Sarah Nelson, who was based in Belfast at the time and who had numerous formal and informal interviews with members of both the UVF and VPP, felt that the VPP's policies were too radical for loyalism at the time. In her book, "Ulster's Uncertain Defenders", she writes: -

For those like many former Northern Ireland Labour Party voters the VPP hoped to attract by its radicalism, a party linked to the UVF could not be trusted as radical. Most dramatic, perhaps, were the reactions of influential loyalists in Belfast. UUUC politicians, Orangemen and religious fundamentalists, far from ignoring the VPP like the media, gave it attention out of all proportion to its size or strength.

This loyalist alliance wages a campaign against the VPP which featured allegations of Communism, atheism, pro-Republicanism, debauchery and all manner of vices...The VPP had few weapons with which to combat all this. It tended to provoke feelings of helplessness and frustration, increasing the hostility the VPP already felt towards loyalist politicians.

Ms Nelson could have been writing about the Progressive Unionist Party. The same allegations from the same kind of people that were made against the VPP in 1974 have been repeated ad nauseam against the PUP since the ceasefire(s) in 1994. Some of the most bitter attacks on the VPP and the UVF came from an organisation known as TARA. This was a small group of Orangemen, all purporting to be Evangelical Christians, led by William Mc Grath. Members of TARA were said to have had powerful influence within mainstream unionism and a number of its members later came to prominence in both the Ulster Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionist Party. The organisation suffered a death blow when its leader, Mc Grath, was convicted and imprisoned for the sexual abuse of young boys in his care at the Kincora Home.

Following the defeat of Ken Gibson in the 1974 General Election the UVF decided to disband the VPP. It did not, however, completely disengage from politics. Gibson and others remained as political advisors to Brigade Staff and, until his death, the Rev John Stewart continued to have dialogue with senior members of the UVF in West Belfast. Another former member of the Northern Ireland Labour Party, David Overend, also engaged in the dialogue and, along with Hugh Smyth, founded the Progressive Unionist Party.

### **The Long Kesh Experience**

Meanwhile UVF and RHC prisoners in Long Kesh Prison Camp were engaged in a process of critical self-examination that was to complement the work of Hugh Smyth and David Overend and lead to the politicisation of a great many volunteers. A number of these are now prominent members of the Progressive Unionist Party.

The foundations for the transition from armed responses to the republican campaign to a political response were laid within the cages of Long Kesh. Under the tutelage and encouragement of Gusty Spence, the Officer Commanding UVF and RHC prisoners in the Compound Sector of Long Kesh, many prisoners began to reflect seriously on the history of the conflict and on how where they thought it was leading to. As Spence once commented, "We have to explore and investigate and dissect and analyse what had led most of us to be there".

The following extract from Roy Garland's booklet, "Seeking a Political Accommodation", is based on an interview with Gusty Spence and gives us an insight into what Spence was trying to achieve in prison: -

"It wasn't only the seminars about the violence, but seminars about our origins, about the working class. About our lack of opportunity, our disadvantage; about the education we received and how it lacked. It was only too obvious that in coming from a working class area – unless you and exceptional parents, or unless you were an exceptional person with exceptional ability – you weren't going anywhere. That's what Long Kesh was all about. It was about investigating our backgrounds, our attitudes to life and everything else. They way people have been manipulated or told that they were 'the people'..."

"...We had a study hut where we stocked our own particular type of books. Not military-type books, I'm talking about history books, sociology books, and (books on) politics, all those types of books geared towards making us a better society, even within Long Kesh. Whenever you have a thing that's hard earned, it is terribly important, whereas when it is made easy for you, it can become boring. You have to seek yourself. You get the first key and you open the door. You present that key to someone else. You close the door behind you and let them go through the door. It is no use finding the way through the door for them. At the same time if they want counsel and advice you offer that."

As one who was there and who was involved in the seminars and the dialogue I can verify the truth of Spence's comments. For the first time in their lives many UVF/RHC volunteers began to seriously examine the history and the philosophy of Unionism as well as the history and experiences of the unionist working classes. They were beginning to think politically as well as militarily. For many of us it was a new experience. As David Boulton (The UVF 1966-73) has noted, "This story of the UVF is not a tale of Protestant terrorism. It is the story of how the Protestant working class was forced in extremes to take off on a voyage of self-discovery. It is a voyage that is not over yet – indeed, it is barely begun. But that it has begun, and that there can be no going back, is the light shining in Ulster's present darkness".

As politicised prisoners were released from Long Kesh back into the community many of them began to engage in dialogue with Hugh Smyth and others who were providing political analysis to the UVF and RHC. Thus began a slow process of politicisation and the development proper of the Progressive Unionist Party.

### **Building on the Foundations**

After the cease-fires, which were declared on 13th October 1994, the Progressive Unionist Party recognised a great need to open an office in the loyalist heartland of the Shankill Road in West Belfast. The Party was well aware that traditionally the Protestant working classes had remained on the periphery of the political arena and seized an opportunity to ensure that this group would now have a voice. An office was opened in November 1994 to be used as a central base for the Party and also to act as an advice/drop-in centre for the general public. The Party started off with a small group of members in West and East Belfast. Since then until the present day the Party membership has grown to such an extent that it now has branches covering almost all of Northern Ireland. There is also a Women's Commission and a youth wing known as Progressive Youth.

In December of 1994 the Progressive Unionist Party entered into exploratory dialogue with the British Government, this gave the Party an opportunity to put forward its policies on various concerns such as social and economic issues, decommissioning, policing and prisoner issues. These talks eventually led to the Forum elections of 1996 in which the Party succeeded in getting two representatives elected to the Multi Party Talks. The multi-party talks provided the Party with forum for debate on a broad range of issue and, besides the two elected representatives to the talks, there were many individual members working in the background, giving their time, energies and resources on a voluntary basis to the Party.

The Progressive Unionist Party is fully committed to the peace process and its aim has always been for a power-sharing all-inclusive style of government. The Party has been successful in contesting local government elections and has fielded candidates in both the Westminster and European elections. It had two representatives elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1998.

Throughout the peace process the Progressive Unionist Party consulted widely with its membership and the local community. This has enabled grass roots political participation for people who in the past had often found themselves marginalised. The party would argue that it was not just instrumental in persuading the UVF and RHC that dialogue was the way forward it would also argue that the wide consultation process has been instrumental in maintaining the cease-fire.

While the leadership of both the Ulster Volunteer Force and Red Hand Commando engage in dialogue with the Progressive Unionist Party with a view to jointly analysing political issues, no member of either organisation is required to support the Progressive Unionist Party either by becoming a member, canvassing for candidates or voting for candidates. The special relationship between the UVF/RHC and the PUP is based partly on former associations and partly on the trust and respect that has been generated through dialogue. The leadership's respect for the political analysis of the PUP has not diminished over the years, but this does not mean that the UVF/RHC will always accept the analysis given or that the PUP will always endorse or speak favourably about UVF/RHC activities.

### **Core Principles**

The core principles that underpin the political programme of the Progressive Unionist Party are as follows: -

"It is our duty to empower ordinary people in their endeavours to reach their full potential as human beings. Any policy or proposed policy that militates against the empowerment of the individual is contrary to the principles of the Progressive

Unionist Party. Within the structures of the PUP every member has the right and the opportunity to contribute to the formulation of policy as well as having the right and the opportunity to seek election to offices within the party. The Annual Conference, which is the only legislative assembly of the PUP, gives all branches the right and the opportunity to vote for or against policy proposals.

“Within the structures of society at large, the Progressive Unionist Party believes that local community groups and special interest groups are in a better position than political organisations to know what their needs really are. It is the task of the Progressive Unionist Party to assist communities (geographical communities and communities of interest) to identify their needs and to assist them in achieving their needs through the political process. The principles and practice of participative democracy empower individuals and communities to work for the enrichment and enhancement of their own lives.

“When people are empowered to identify and to develop quality sustainable responses to existing and emerging needs within their communities, they are taking ownership of their individual and corporate lives. The Progressive Unionist Party must always be conscious of the fact that it is the servant of the people. We neither own the needs, the process or the beneficial outcomes of the process. We are simply facilitators and advocates for change. “Communities and individuals own their needs and consequently they must own the process of meeting their needs. They must also own the benefits gained through their participation in the process. We must constantly ask ourselves, “Will our policies and activities lead communities to take control of their own lives”? Our activities must also be about empowering people not about empowering ourselves?

“Equality is essential to democracy. Northern Ireland will never be truly democratic if any section of it is excluded from the institutions of state. An equal society is one in which all members have access to similar resources and opportunities and in which they all value each other for their common humanity. The PUP calls not just for equality of opportunity, but also for equality of outcomes. Equality will mean the removal of both privileges and deprivations so that access is truly open to all. Equality is essential if proper relationships are to be promoted for it is the fuel that drives people into democratic relationships. It is the glue that bonds them in proper democratic actions and it will be the power behind a thriving non-sectarian process of participative democracy”.

## **The Peace Process**

### **Introduction**

Many former UVF/RHC ex-prisoners have embraced the principles of non-violence without turning their backs on those volunteers who remain committed to the principle of armed resistance. They believe that the genuine soldier and the genuine peace-builder can co-exist within the one broader movement and that through dialogue they can help the broader movement to develop a strategy for genuine conflict transformation that will help build a new peaceful and democratic future for the people of Northern Ireland.

The statement issued on behalf of the Combined Loyalist Military Command when the Loyalist ceasefire was announced in October 1994 set the tone for a new way forward: -

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

“Let us firmly resolve to respect our differing views of freedom, culture and aspiration and never again permit our political circumstances to degenerate into bloody warfare.

“We are on the threshold of a new and exciting beginning with our battles in the future being political battles, fought on the side of honesty, decency and democracy against the negativity of mistrust, misunderstanding and malevolence, so that, together we can bring forth a wholesome society in which our children, and their children, will know the meaning of true peace”.

Many within the loyalist community were sincere when they expressed agreement with the contents of the statement. Commenting on the significance of the cease-fire statement, David Ervine claimed it was “a statement that pulled the curtain down, or we hoped would pull the curtain down, on a brutal and awful past”.

The content of the ceasefire statement was pregnant with hope for the future, pregnant with the hope that the peace process would give birth to a new progressive and democratic loyalism. Sadly, we know from experience that pregnancies can be terminated. We know too that there can be stillbirths and premature births. Pregnancies, like hope itself, must be nurtured if new life is to be brought forth. A careful reading of the statement will show that loyalists still expected that there would be “battles in the future”. They were not so naïve as to expect a tea & buns relationship with our political foes and they fully

expected that loyalists would still have to engage republicans and nationalists in political battle. Political battles require political activism, not the flexing of muscles and the marking out of territory. Marking out community space, whether it is within or between communities, inevitably leads to contested space and the conflict and violence that come with it.

Thirty years of violent conflict has solved nothing. All sides have been forced to admit that they had reached a military stalemate. It had become abundantly clear that there were going to be no winners and losers, and even those who believed in the legitimacy of armed conflict were forced to conclude that to prolong the cycle of violence with no achievable outcome in sight was an exercise in immoral futility. Violence has been weighed in the balance and has been found wanting. It exacerbates rather than resolves problems.

The path laid out for loyalists in the ceasefire statement was the path of genuine dialogue and progressive political activism. It was a path that demanded a new set of values – honesty, decency and democracy. For those of us who sincerely believe in the basic thesis of that statement there is no alternative to the path that it has marked out for us – the path of democratic political action.

David Ervine has often remarked that soldiers do not fight simply to win wars, they fight to secure peace. Loyalists, while holding to the principle of armed resistance, must also hold to the principle that soldiers have a role in building peace and in rebuilding communities that have been torn apart by violent conflict. Genuine peace building is not for the so-called “peaceniks” – it is for the volunteer and the loyalist activist as well. The UVF/RHC, claiming as they do, to be “The People’s Army, have a duty to ensure that something positive and good comes out of the process that we are now embarked upon. The sore and pressing evil of the PIRA ‘armed struggle’ (though other republican groups remain a threat) has been removed and it is now up to all of us to work politically for the development of a just, equitable and peaceful society.

### **Peace Building**

Peace building is not the same as conflict resolution. In a constitutional struggle such as we have in Northern Ireland it is not possible to resolve the Unionist-Republican conflict without either unionists or nationalists accepting the constitutional position of the other. Peace building within the Northern Ireland context is about conflict transformation, not conflict resolution. It is about transforming (1) the nature of the conflict (from violence to politics) and (2) the nature of the relationships between the parties in conflict. Basically it is about developing non-violent responses to conflict. The ceasefire (s) simply created the opportunity for this to happen. They did not create peace for genuine peace is much more than an absence of violence.

It is easy to prescribe methods of peace building to help address the problems of Northern Ireland. It is not so easy to put such prescriptions into practice. Peace building is a process in which we seek to move from violent responses to conflict to non-violent responses. This process is as much a way of life for the peace activist as soldiering is for the volunteer. Activism is about doing things that impact upon others. But it must first of all have an impact upon our own lives. If we are going to be serious about peace building we must live it out in our daily lives.

The process started for many volunteers when they personally acknowledged that violent responses to conflict were simply leading us further and further into an unending cycle of violence and counter-violence. Upon their release from prison they committed themselves to non-violent activism. It was not long before they began to realise that non-violence and peace building were not one-and-the-same. The anti-peace rhetoric of certain self-professed ‘non-violent’ constitutional politicians certainly demonstrates that physical non-violence does not always mean that one is supportive of peace building. Indeed the history of the Northern Ireland conflict shows that the violence of the tongue and the pen often precedes the violence of the bomb and the bullet. It shows too that the demonising of both individuals and communities all too often provides the rationale for paramilitary targeting.

Peace building for the genuine loyalist is not about achieving a result for loyalism through non-violent means. Nor is it merely about resolving conflict through the politics of non-violence. It is not even about achieving agreement through non-violent means. It is about seeking a commitment to developing creative alternatives to violence through dialogue with the enemy. It is crucial therefore that both current and former participants in the conflict are regarded as key resources in the peace building process. They are not mere recipients of imposed solutions but an essential part of the transforming, healing and restorative process. They must, however, be sincere in their desire for both non-violence and the democratic process.

Genuine peace building is based on equity and fairness and is something that each person must do for himself or herself as they interact with other human beings. It is about each individual helping to repair the damage that has been done through conflict and violence and acknowledging the wrongs and injustices that they have imposed on others as well as the ones that they have suffered themselves. It is about engaging the enemy to prevent future injustices. These are things that each peace activist as an individual can and should do in his/her daily life. They are not things that we should wait on others to achieve for us (certainly not the political process or the criminal justice system).



There is no place in peace building for “getting even” or “settling the score”. There is no place for victims becoming victimisers or for demands for inquiries and ‘truth’ telling that demands only answers of one community or from one protagonist. This simply reverses the cycle of alienation and perpetuates the conflict. Peace building is about trying to understand our perceived enemy and about trying to see conflict through the eyes of our enemy. It is about developing opportunities for transformation, both personal and communal. It is about responding on the basis of human need for present healing and for future relationships.

Peace building demands personal involvement. It is not a process for others. It is a process for us – for me as an individual. It is the process that I am committed to and that has become a part of my way of life. Sustainable peace will only come to Northern Ireland when all of us who live in it become *personally* active as peace builders.

### **Compromise is not Surrender**

There are core principles that not even the most ardent loyalist peace-builder can give way on. The core principles of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant – the material well-being of the people, the principles of civil and religious freedom and equal citizenship within the Union – are not negotiable. While there may be, and indeed are, a great many areas where loyalists can make compromises they dare not surrender their right to exist as British citizens or their right to full civil, religious freedom and protection of their social and economic rights.

The following political principles drawn up in 1994 at the time of the CLMC ceasefire remain core issues for loyalist peace-builders as much as loyalist paramilitaries: -

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

These principles provide a fair basis for genuine conflict transformation and long-term peace building. Two of these six principles (1) and (2) indicate what loyalists will not concede while the other four indicate areas where political opponents can meet to address their differences. They recognise the ongoing nature of the constitutional conflict and the differing aspirations of loyalists and nationalists, but they also call for the conflict to be addressed within the Rule of Law and the democratic process.

### **Undermining the Peace Process**

No constituency has been more consistent in supporting both the political process and the community peace process than the Progressive Unionist Party. The PUP, with support from the UVF and RHC, has sought to uphold the six principles drawn up by the CLMC at the time of its ceasefire by seeking to build trust and confidence within and between communities in conflict. Sadly, those efforts have not been matched by the political representatives of either constitutional nationalism or republicanism. The republican “wish list” in particular seems to be written down on an endless sheet of paper and there appears to be a reluctance on the part of republicans to honour any agreement without demanding something extra for its own constituency. Consequently both the political process and the community peace process have been bedevilled by crisis after crisis.

The implementation of any peace agreement requires all parties to the agreement to strike a careful balance between “process” and “compliance”. When it comes to implementing those elements of the agreement that republicans desire most, they demand immediate compliance. But when it comes to implementing elements of the agreement that unionists desire, republicans insist that this must come after a lengthy process. Admittedly anti-agreement unionists and elements within the Ulster Unionist Party have adopted a similar strategy. Republicans, however, refuse to give way on anything without insisting on being rewarded with “extras” that were never part of the original agreement.

Sinn Fein still operates on the basis that their conflict is one between an oppressed people and a foreign British State, thus they insist on pressurising the British and Irish governments to accede to demands never agreed to with unionists. Unionist opinion does not appear to be relevant to republicans. What they could not achieve by military means, the republican

movement seeks to achieve by political means under the guise of the peace process. Sadly, mainstream unionists, whether pro or anti agreement, do not appear to have the political acumen to effectively challenge Sinn Fein. They simply respond to Sinn Fein by making demands of republicans that are complied with only by the extraction by Sinn Fein of yet more concessions from the Government. Thus we have a vicious cycle of demand and counter-demand and the inevitable granting of concessions that were never part of the Belfast Agreement.

While Sinn Fein parades itself across the world as the architects of the peace process, the IRA continues to engage in weapons procurement, intelligence gathering and liaisons with internationalist terrorists. Using the political institutions at Stormont to gather information on political opponents, prison staff, police officers and loyalists was not only a flagrant breach of democratic principles, it was the straw that broke the camels back in terms of confidence building. The most damning aspect of the republican movements activities has not been the activities of the IRA, damaging and all as they have been, it has been Sinn Fein's inability to admit the truth. Sinn Fein's repeated denials that such things are happening does nothing to inspire trust or confidence in their self-proclaimed commitment to resolve conflict through peaceful and democratic means. The republican "fall back" position of blaming "the Brits" for their own bad behaviour just doesn't wash anymore.

If republicans are serious about building a genuine peace process they must disengage from the charade of playing the perpetual victim and start living in the real world. They must, as John Hume once said, "draw a line under the past" and get down to the business of living in the present and preparing for the future. Sinn Fein, rather than putting behind them the bitterness of the past, actually thrives on it. They breathe it as others breathe air. It is the oxygen that feeds the flames of their current bitterness. Bob Mc Cartney once said that when history becomes "a catechism of past grievances, it is a corrosive curse". Sinn Fein's continual rehearsal of past grievances, as excuses for their failure to take responsibility for the present, sounds very much like children memorising and repeating the answers in the Sunday School catechism; and that truly has been the curse of the peace process.

### **Rescuing the Peace Process**

Because of the ineptitude of mainstream unionism to effectively stand up to Sinn Fein with a cohesive political and cultural programme of resistance, and the recurrent capitulation of the government to republican demands there is a feeling within the wider unionist community that the peace process is being driven and controlled in the interests of republicanism. The apparent gains being made by Sinn Fein as a result of both the Belfast Agreement and concessions granted outside the Agreement, together with the undeniable fact that Sinn Fein appears to be riding the crest of a political wave, has led to a great deal of frustration and despondency within large sections of the unionist community. All this has left the PUP, as the most consistent defender of the peace process, vulnerable within its own constituency. As Peter Hadden has noted, the PUP "found themselves defending an Agreement that was not delivering anything in the working class areas, and, worse, appearing through this to be defending David Trimble and the UUP against the DUP challenge".

Unless we want to return to the days of violent conflict and bloody warfare the peace process must be rescued. The political process must be rescued from the insatiable demands of Sinn Fein and from the political ineptitude of mainstream unionism, and the community peace process must be rescued from the instability created by interface violence and nationalist expansionism. This calls for a strong united response by the wider constituency represented by the UVF/RHC and PUP. The statement issued by loyalists at the announcement of the 1994 ceasefire recognised that there would still be battles to be fought and that those battles would be "political battles, fought on the side of honesty, decency and democracy against the negativity of mistrust, misunderstanding and malevolence". That was not a political statement issued by the Progressive Unionist Party, it was a statement issued by the CLMC and endorsed by the UVF and RHC and thus needs to be implemented by the UVF and RHC.

The recurring crises in the peace process must be brought to a halt and that can only happen when republicanism is effectively challenged at both political and community level, and when ineffective unionist leadership is replaced by an effective loyalist leadership. It is time for those who once engaged in a campaign of armed resistance to republican terror to intervene and engage once again with republicanism; only this time through a strategic programme of unarmed resistance.

Unarmed resistance may involve selective picketing, peaceful protests, public demonstrations and even non-violent acts of civil disobedience. Those who framed the Solemn League and Covenant were prepared for the eventuality that a Home Rule Parliament might be set up against their will and included a clause stating that "in the event of such a parliament being forced upon us we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognise its authority". Clearly "refusing to recognise authority" involved disobedience. Our forbears would not countenance recognising the authority of any imposed political solution and loyalist should not countenance recognising the authority or validity of any imposed political concession conceded in secret deals between Sinn Fein and the British Government. Loyalists need to go on the offensive politically, socially and culturally. The UVF-RHC-PUP constituency must unite and act as one single movement and with one single objective – to secure peace and stability for our people within the union.

Loyalists who are confident in their own identity and in their own abilities as a political and cultural community have nothing

to fear by embracing a programme of unarmed resistance. Unarmed resistance is not a soft option. It demands much in terms of commitment, courage, self-control and moral argument. As Martin Luther King Junior once pointed out, the unarmed resister "is passive or non-aggressive in the sense that he is not physically aggressive towards his opponent. But his mind and emotions are always active, constantly seeking to persuade the opponent that he is mistaken".

The power of moral force and unarmed resistance has the capacity to build stronger, more resilient and more courageous people. The path of non-violence is tougher and requires infinitely more courage and moral strength to engage in than does physical violence. As the Baptist theologian, Dr Ron Sider, has pointed out "Non-violent resistance...is not for fools or cowards. It demands courage and daring of the highest order". Consequently, it is not merely an exercise in peaceful conflict resolution, it is also an exercise in personal and communal character building. Likewise, the force of moral argument – the kind of rational argument that informs the minds of both our opponents and the watching world - has the capacity to achieve better results than arguments that appeal to raw emotions and violent instincts.

The process of unarmed resistance may take some considerable time before real progress is achieved and it takes strength of character and resilience to stick with the lengthy and frustrating process of dialogue. Surely the slow lumbering process of unarmed resistance and political activism is preferable by far to the slow lumbering processions of distraught mourners wending their way down city streets and through country lanes to our cemeteries and churchyards. There is a Biblical proverb that warns, "Where there is no vision, the people perish". This warning may well be applied to our current situation in Ulster. Without a vision for a new way of doing politics and a new way of dealing with our conflict, people will continue to perish. Enough people have perished. It is time for us bring life to our people.

Genuine peace-building is too precious and too important to be left to either disingenuous republicans or ineffective self-serving politicians. The process belongs to the people, not just to the politicians; and it belongs to all of the people, not just to the nationalist and republican people.

## For God and Ulster

*We, whose names are underwritten..humbly relying on the God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted, do hereby pledge ourselves in solemn covenant...*

The motto, "For God and Ulster", has been associated with the Ulster Volunteer Force since 1912 and continues to be inscribed on the badge of the modern UVF. No discussion of loyalism in general, and the Ulster Volunteer Force in particular, would be complete without a chapter on the subject of "For God and Ulster". We cannot justify retaining the historic motto of the Ulster Volunteer Force without trying to understand its meaning for those who introduced it in 1912 and what it should mean for us today in the 21st century.

Many of our covenanting forbears believed that incorporation into a state that was dominated by Catholic Nationalism would not only undermine their civil and religious liberties but would also undermine and seek the destruction of their Protestant faith. Thus they regarded their opposition to Home Rule as much a spiritual project, as it was a political or economic one.

Those who framed the Solemn League and Covenant drew heavily on the Scottish Solemn League and Covenant and on the distinctive theology of Calvinistic Presbyterianism that underpinned the Scottish Covenant. In his contribution to the "Faith in Ulster" anthology published by ECONI, Paul Reid, leader of the Christian Fellowship Church in East Belfast, gives an excellent summary of the theological thinking that underpinned the linking of God and Ulster in the mind of our forbears: -

"The Biblical concept of God and country is one routed deep in the Old Testament. The link between Israel and the 'Promised Land' begins with God's promise to Abram in Genesis 12.1. This is followed up on numerous occasions by God restating that promise to His people (Genesis 15.7; Exodus 3.17; Joshua 1.1-9).

"The blessing upon the people was conditional on them being in the right land. That is why so much of the Book of Joshua is taken up with getting the 'wrong people' – that is, the Canaanites, Amorites and so on – out of the land. The covenant God made involved three specific clauses – they had to do with property (the land), people (the nation) and prosperity (the blessing). This history of Israel is the history of keeping property, people and the promise of prosperity together" (Faith in Ulster p 94).

To our covenanting forefathers, Ulster was the Promised Land and they were the chosen people, and the blessing depended on Ulster remaining under the control of the Lord's chosen people. As Paul Reid comments, "The story of Israel was transposed to seventeenth century Ulster and the concept of God, country and blessing became part of our history". The threat of Ulster being incorporated into a Catholic dominated Irish state threatened the land, the chosen people and their prosperity. Thus politics, economics and religion were inextricably linked in the minds of our forefathers.

## Catholic Nationalism

The rise of a distinctively Catholic nationalist movement during the 19th century helped to generate a real fear that Home Rule posed a threat to the land, the people and the blessing. During the first half of the 19th century the Catholic Church in Ireland embarked upon a strategic programme to influence the social and political life of the country. Patrick Maume, in a biographical note to a collection of writings by Arthur Clery, refers to "the endeavour of the Catholic senior clergy to create a class of Catholic professionals responsive to clerical guidance who would service the Catholic population and influence the Irish administration in accordance with the Church's interests". This religious project ran in parallel with the political project of Irish nationalism and in 1885 the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, W.J. Walsh, succeeded in having Catholic priests appointed to county conventions for the selection of candidates for election to Parliament. This enabled the religious and the political projects to converge and, as the historian Brian Walker has pointed out, "this clerical involvement (was to be) a central feature of nationalist politics in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland".

Although there were a number of Protestant nationalists, including leaders such as Charles Stewart Parnell, the nationalist movement as a whole came to be a Catholic project and was regarded by many within the Ulster Protestant community as a threat not only to their political existence but also to their very existence as a faith community. The introduction of the Ne Temere decree in 1907 which required the Protestant partner in mixed marriages to sign a declaration that any children would be brought up in the Roman Catholic faith helped to fuel Protestant fears about Catholic intentions. The Ne Temere was clearly an attack on the people, just as Home Rule was an attack on the land, and both were seen as an attack on the blessing. This fear was reflected by the Northern Whig newspaper on 30th September 1912 when it declared that "Home Rule is at bottom a war against Protestantism, and an attempt to establish a Roman Catholic ascendancy in this country".

The rise of Catholic Nationalism in the south of the country was contemporary with the effects of the 1859 Evangelical Revival that swept through large parts of Ulster rekindling a theology that was both opposed to that of the Church of Rome and that kept alive the covenantal theology of historic Presbyterianism. There was, therefore, a clear religious dimension to Unionist opposition to Home Rule and evangelical Protestantism became the spiritual heartbeat of the Unionist community.

That the framers of the Solemn League and Covenant should turn to "the God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted" is wholly understandable. However, their use of this phrase, and the term "For God and Ulster", did not go without criticism. Dr Finlay Homes, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, and a prominent Church Historian, writes,

"For God and Ulster recalls the Ulster Covenant of 1912, in which our forefathers pledged themselves to resist Home Rule as a sacred duty. Some of their critics saw what they were doing as idolatry, an exercise in self-interest, protecting privilege and serving Mammon rather than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".  
(Faith in Ulster pp 64-65)

In my own contribution to the anthology "Faith in Ulster" I voiced my own concerns about using the name of God for political purposes. While I fully endorse the view that ethics as mediated through the Word of God ought to inform and influence me in my political and cultural activity, I believe that any philosophy that seeks to legitimise a political or cultural cause by invoking the name of God is bordering on the blasphemous. God is the God of all mankind, not just the Ulster Protestant, and we need to be careful that we are not guilty of creating a tribal God in our own image and for the purpose of justifying our actions.

However, in the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries I do not believe that the use of the motto was intended to claim that God was either an Ulster Protestant or an Ulster Unionist, nor was it intended, as Professor Joseph Lee suggests, to remind God whose side He was on. It was used by men and women of faith who sincerely believed that their faith community, which comprised the land and the people, was under threat. Who best for people of faith to turn to than the Source of their faith!

## 21st Century Protestantism

Today, some ninety-one years later, we live in a society that is characterised more by a secular Protestantism than by a spiritual faith-based Protestantism. This is true too within nationalist communities where growing numbers of young people are nominal as opposed to devout mass-going Catholics. Even within the faith community the major Protestant churches enjoy amicable relations with the Roman Catholic Church and only the more extreme fundamentalists see a papist plot behind every utterance of Catholic bishops and politicians.

The idea that God's promises to His people are linked to the land or that any people are by birth and heritage God's people is no longer regarded as sound theology. Again, to quote Paul Reid, "I am an Ulsterman, I am proud to be Irish and an Ulsterman. I cannot change the past history or how I was brought up; but my identity and security is not bound up with where I was born. That can only be found in Christ". This view would be widespread within evangelical Protestant



denominations. The idea that God is on the side of any one political cause or that He takes sides in conflicts over land and territory is no longer acceptable to the vast majority of religious Protestants.

Where does all this leave those who still hold dear the motto "For God and Ulster"? If the spiritual children of the covenanters are no longer comfortable with the term, what about the secular children of the covenanters! If we are honest with ourselves, few within the Ulster Volunteer Force and Red Hand Commando or Progressive Unionist Party would claim to be Protestants in the spiritual sense. The Protestantism of modern loyalism is secular rather than spiritual. Even where there is a belief in the idea of God, that belief is little more than an intellectual belief or a gut feeling that there is something or somebody "up there". We cannot escape the fact that the God of "For God and Ulster" and the "God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted" is a God that demands a spiritual response and a specific code of morality from those who dare to name Him as theirs. That response cannot be found in a secular Protestant lifestyle.

Gregory Campbell of the DUP in "Faith in Ulster" (pp 36-37) believes that the motto "is properly used in the context of a beleaguered embattled people having been so vilified and so misrepresented that they must seek a refuge which will not betray them". However, he goes on to say that the term has been "considerably devalued in recent years because of its use in association with some whose activities include the drugs trade, racketeering and so-called punishment beatings". No prizes for guessing who Mr Campbell is referring to. The Rev Martin Smyth is equally scathing in his rejection of those whom he claims have turned the motto into a slogan that has been "debased by their evil exploits". Like Gregory Campbell he believes that the motto is still valid when used for the right reasons. But, says he, "It is vital ... that we do not allow corruption to pervert a glorious reality". Again, no prizes for guessing who he is referring to.

They are not alone in making such criticisms and we need to acknowledge that there is a whole swathe of Protestant opinion that believes loyalists have corrupted the meaning of "For God and Ulster". We could argue, as David Ervine has, that only a small minority of loyalists are engaged in activities that bring loyalism into disrepute, and that loyalism should not be painted black with large brush strokes. We could argue, and argue convincingly, that both the churches and civic unionism have deserted the working class communities where loyalism has flourished and that they must share some of the responsibility for the state of those communities. We could argue too that loyalists are not alone in devaluing the principles that lie behind the motto. We could also respond by reminding some of our critics that issues about devaluing and corrupting traditional principles did not really worry them when they had meetings with loyalists during the course of the past thirty years or when they collaborated with loyalists during the UWC Stoppage and other campaigns. Some of us have long memories. But such arguments would fall on deaf ears. Loyalists are deemed to be so far beyond redemption that our voices are hardly worthy to be heard. But before we write off their criticisms and respond with "They would say that, wouldn't they" we do need to be honest and seriously examine the ethics and the value base of modern-day loyalism. Let us engage in, and respond to, our own self-criticism.

Secularism has increased dramatically since the swinging sixties and there are few within loyalism who are deeply concerned about either the state of religion or about the claims of God on their lives. However, the decline in religious observance has not completely led to a decline in religious values and those values ought to be retained even by a loyalism that is characterised by secularism. There is a basic morality, rooted in our historic Protestant faith that is essential to human decency and the development of a just and equitable society. That basic morality ought to press upon us the need for loyalists to oppose, and to be seen to be opposing, those very things which Gregory Campbell and Martin Smyth say are devaluing the historic motto of the Ulster Volunteer Force.

We cannot strike the motto "For God and Ulster" from those flags and emblems that commemorate the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant or the original Ulster Volunteer Force. History cannot be rewritten to make it fit in with the secularism of the twenty-first century or with the changing theological trends of modern evangelicalism. "For God and Ulster" is an integral part of the past and if the modern Ulster Volunteer Force and the Progressive Unionist Party genuinely wish to maintain the link with the past, and to continue to be the keepers of the traditions associated with 1912, they must ensure that the motto, which is as sacred as the traditions themselves, is not devalued or brought into disrepute. It is essential therefore that the loyalism that we represent maintains high moral and ethical standards. If it is an honour to wear the badge and to carry the standards, the motto on both the badge and the standards must in turn be honoured by those who wear and carry them.

## **Ulster's Solemn League & Covenant**

**Saturday, 28 September 1912.**

Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as of the whole of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship and perilous to the unity of the Empire, we, whose names are underwritten, men of Ulster, loyal subjects of his Gracious Majesty King George V., humbly relying on the God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted, do hereby pledge ourselves in solemn Covenant throughout this our time of threatened calamity to stand by one

another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland. And in the event of such a parliament being forced upon us we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognise its authority. In sure confidence that God will defend the right we hereto subscribe our names. And further, we individually declare that we have not already signed this Covenant.

The above was signed by me at  
'Ulster Day', Saturday, 28th September, 1912.  
GOD SAVE THE KING

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In preparing the papers that make up this document I have gleaned information from a wide range of literature and, because the project was originally intended to be for personal use, I have not kept a record of where attributed quotations have been taken. However the following books were consulted and all quotations and references used in the papers can be found somewhere in their pages.

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