Out of the Darkness: A Look at Violence and Politics Through the Experience of the UVF

Alec Chiquoine

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Out of the Darkness:
A look at violence and politics through the experience of the UVF

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye.
Who cheer when soldier lads pass by.
Sneak home and pray you’ll never know
the hell where youth and laughter go.
-Poem on a UVF mural in West Belfast

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SIT Ireland Spring 2006
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This paper simply would not have been possible had it not been for the incredible generosity and helpfulness of others. I believe it is a testament to the character of the people of Northern Ireland and a tribute to their dedication to transforming and resolving the problems and conflicts which challenge them every day that they were so open with their time and opinions. I would like to thank the Sandy Row Orange Lodge, the Martyr’s Memorial Church and its entire congregation, EPIC and its staff, Dominic Bryan, Christopher Stalford, Roy Garland and the Sandy Row UUP office, David Ervine, Dawn Purvis, Tom Roberts, and Henry McDonald for their time and openness. I would like to extend a special thanks to particular members and elements of the UVF and its leadership for willingly giving me their perspective.

Finally, I must give a very special thanks to Chris Hudson and the congregation of All Soul’s Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church in Belfast. The hospitality of the congregation was truly amazing, and the willingness of the members to “adopt” a student such as myself was fantastic. Without Chris Hudson, his time, and his patience, this project would not have been possible. I owe him an enormous debt of gratitude.

Foreword:

The decision to undertake this specific project was relatively easy for me. I came to Ireland ready to learn more about the conflict, but quickly realized I hardly knew about, let alone understood, an entire element within it, that of the Loyalist paramilitaries. As I learned more through classes, lectures, and meeting individuals who had been involved with these groups, or had dealings with them, my knowledge grew along with
my curiosity. Who were these people who were so willing to fight, kill and die for a cause, the preservation of a union with Britain, which I found hard to understand? I also became interested in with the use of violence, rather than politics or non-violent means, to achieve a particular set of ends. Northern Ireland was a fully functioning government, a subset of the United Kingdom, one of the oldest and most successful political structures in history. Why then had Northern Ireland crumbled into a state of unbridled violence when political structures existed which seemed capable of creating such change while minimizing the loss involved?

The act of questioning my expectations and preconceived notions has developed into a theme of my time in Ireland and Northern Ireland. To view these countries through textbooks, video, the media and occasional speakers is to receive only part of the story. However, I certainly formed opinions and pictures in my head in relationship to what I took to be the whole picture, as I am sure many others do. My time in Ireland and Northern Ireland has forced me to step back from what I believed to be “true” and take in often times conflicting information in an entirely new context which would challenge those old truths. As is so often the case, the truth is almost always more complicated than it seems.

But this paper is not about the truth. I would be truly bold and more than a little rash to claim that in my short time studying violence in Northern Ireland as it related to the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) I had some how stumbled across any truths, let alone the truth. What I have done, and what I set out to do, is compile together a set of experiences, opinions, and stories which all relate to the truth and recount personal truths.
I will also offer my own analysis of this compilation not in an attempt to prove anything conclusively, but to suggest and encourage that my work is but a tiny part of what has been done, and what must continue to be done, in the search for understanding Northern Ireland, the Troubles, the UVF, politics, and violence.

It would be easy to simply pass judgment on a group such as the UVF, and dismiss, embrace, or ignore it accordingly. The actions of this group, especially to those from outside the Northern Ireland context, and especially the Loyalists communities from which many of its members come, are seemingly incomprehensible, selfish, selfless, cruel, kind, and immensely meaningful and meaningless almost simultaneously. What is created is whirlwind of confusion which further encourages one to simplify and generalize. However, such action prompts one to declare truths and make judgments in an attempt to slow the vortex of confusion. What should be remembered is that another method of examination and exploration exists. It is one which embraces this very confusion and heterogeneity by seeking to gather in the various parts for closer analysis in comparison to their partners. Although not easy, and seemingly against logic and nature at times, I do believe this process can lead to greater understanding and a better ability to draw conclusions which are well based and highly accurate.

Only through such analysis and gathering the multitude of experiences and opinions can we hope to develop better understandings of such complex and changing, yet important topics. The reader should take this paper as an open invitation to criticize, challenge, confirm, accept, and/or deny any of what it contains. The only request I make is that it is approached with an open mind, and that the reader them self endeavors to find
the same understanding I am searching for in creating this work through similar methods. I hope to stay true to the same expectations and creed in my writing.

**Methodology:**

To give a cohesive and coherent account of this project and how I went about it is difficult to say the least. I had no real plan going in, and what I did have was quickly changed when I started. Perhaps more difficult is the fact that field study and experiential learning do not seem to lend themselves to structure and explanation at times. However, it is very important that any reader has an idea of what it was I was trying to do, how I went about it, and what the results were. Equally important is for me to have a chance to explain myself in these regards and caution the reader as to potential shortcomings, biases, missing information, and other facts which may effect one’s reading and understanding of the subject at hand. In the following section I will attempt to do this in as concise and understandable a manner as possible.

**Literary Overview**

The first step of my research was largely based in academic material. This was both intentional and a matter of convenience. Background information was essential before I could begin my interview process and would help me to get an idea of what organizations, individuals and areas I should investigate. Also, given that the start date of the project was Easter weekend, most individuals were on holiday, and the vast majority of organizations and groups were closed for several days. It was actually very difficult for the entire week following Easter to reach anyone in a formal setting as many were
still closed. The following is a brief review of the literary material I used for this project, its usefulness, and anything else I believe the reader should know about the source.

**UVF by John Cusack and Henry McDonald:** This was my major introduction to the UVF and its history. Written by security correspondents and journalists the books offers an overview of the UVF as an organization and a detailed history of the group from its origins through the Troubles. It is primarily a historical account of the organization, with little critical analysis although there are some points where the authors offer their own viewpoints and analysis of particular events. As an introduction to the UVF as an organization, its key moments, and history, this book is invaluable. However, it should be noted that even the revised version, which I read, was published in 2000 and only really offers coverage of the group through the mid to late 1990s. As such, it is somewhat dated.

**The Edge of the Union by Steve Bruce:** This book contains a very thorough analysis of Loyalist political and paramilitary positions through out the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. It also offers some coverage of the early 1990s, but as it was published in 1994 is also somewhat dated. Bruce offers helpful explanation of Loyalist identity has it compares to other identities in Northern Ireland, and the group’s actions as a result. There are also some excellent passages where Bruce examines the connections and relationships between violence and politics. However, for my purposes this material was difficult because it not only offered information on the UVF, but also other Loyalists paramilitaries, Loyalism as a class and political identity, Nationalism and Republicanism, and how all of these
fit into greater ideological themes of the Troubles. In short, it is a well written but very broad overview of a variety of subjects, not all of which applied to my topic, but were hard to separate from it.

_The Red Hand_ by Steve Bruce: As I understand it, this is and certainly was one of the foremost books on Loyalists paramilitary groups. Although it does give historical overviews, the book focuses on changing tactics and objectives, interactions with other groups, and development of political and social ideologies. Again, the book is quite dated at this point, having been published in 1992. However, I think it is a testament to the insight of the author and the strength of the material he gathered, that it was very helpful for me in formulating questions for my interviews and directing my research process over fourteen years later. If I were to hope this project could be turned into a book, I would hope it could resemble this work in style and content but in updated form.

_David Ervine_ by Henry Sinnerton: This book is a biography of David Ervine, a former member of the UVF, ex-prisoner, and current Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in the Northern Ireland Assembly as well as a Belfast City Councilor for the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP). I would end up interviewing David Ervine and this book helped me to direct my questioning, not so much in a biographical sense, but gave me ideas for questions I could ask which would have a high likelihood of causing Mr. Ervine to address the topics and subjects I hoped to cover. It also gives a fantastic account of the PUP, its political viewpoints and how those were shaped by the paramilitary experiences of many of its members,
and the involvement of politics and violence in the peace process. Still, the book covers only a single man and it is dangerous to see his perspectives and accounts as being representative of groups as wholes (although I believe the author and the subject try to avoid this sort of generalization and extrapolation).

*Ex-Prisoners and Conflict Transformation* part of the Conflict Transformation Papers series: This paper is part of a series on conflict transformation efforts and perspectives in Northern Ireland. This specific volume was a series of articles written by ex-prisoners and ex-prisoner groups on the subject of conflict transformation and ex-prisoners’ role within that process. It contained views from both Loyalist and Republican traditions although more Republican groups were present. Much of what was said by both groups was helpful in getting a recent perspective from ex-prisoners about the role they are to play in politics, the peace process and conflict transformation. I found much of what the Republican articles covered helpful in a theoretical sense, but I do worry that the Republican perspective on things is not always applicable or congruent with the Loyalist viewpoint.

*Democratizing the Peace in Northern Ireland: Progressive Loyalists and the Politics of Conflict Transformation* of the Conflict Transformation Papers series, written by Aaron Edwards and Stephen Bloom: Published in 2005, this was by far one of the most recent and useful documents I found in terms of guiding me in my investigation of current topics and issues. Essentially, this article covered precisely the more current end of paramilitary experience I wanted to look at, that
being political involvement, the peace process, and criminality. Edwards and Bloom had been suggested to me as good authors on the subject of Loyalist relationships with paramilitaries and politics by a number of individuals and it appears they have published rather extensively on the subject.

*Reflections on Violence* of the Farset Community Think Tanks Project: This was the transcript of a conference held involving a number of academics, politicians, and former combatants from the conflicts of Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine. The objective was to give a group of assembled students from those areas the chance to analysis and rethink their own conflicts through the experience and history of the other. This particular pamphlet is only a transcript of the sections to do with Northern Ireland. Although I would have been very interested to see how the Northern Ireland conflict was seen to compare with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that is another topic for another day. For my purposes, the pamphlet was helpful in providing a transcript of the discussion amongst the various speakers on the Northern Ireland conflict from both Republicanism and Loyalism backgrounds.

*Truth Recovery: A contribution from within Loyalism*: This is a pamphlet which came out of a series of meetings between a large number of Loyalist activist groups around Northern Ireland. Essentially, it was a workshop project designed to produce a coherent message about the role to be played by Loyalism in the peace process of Northern Ireland and the feeling of Loyalists about a proposed truth commission. I did notice that the perspective seemed to be one dominated
from the ex-prisoner point of view, specifically within the UVF and Red Hand Commando (RHC) communities. For my purposes this was terrific and helpful, but as for providing a general contribution from Loyalism, it might not have been completely reflective of the entire Loyalist community.

All these sources did a great deal with guiding and influencing my thinking about Loyalism, the UVF, violence and politics. As the reader will see, I do quote from many, but not always frequently. The reason behind this is that I want the focus of the paper to be the experiences I had and the direct opinions I received, not what has already been stated. However, to receive a more complete picture, it is a good idea to gain the sort of background and alternative knowledge these sources put forth. I would encourage any reader to read these pieces as a supplement to this work as it will enhance their understanding of where I came from as well as provide them with a number of solid platforms from which to critique my work and further explore the subject.

**Personal Background and Personality**

The way in which I approached this project and the successes and shortcomings I experienced all had something directly or indirectly to do with my own personal background and personality. I hope in this section to give the reader an idea, to the best of my ability, of those personal aspects which influenced the project.

The first and most obvious aspect of my background is that I was an American student in Northern Ireland. This was both helpful and a drawback. Being an outsider of the Northern Ireland conflict, unaffiliated with any group or side, likely helped to open some doors to interviews and organizations I may otherwise have been unable to access.
The fact I was also perceived as being neutral, open, and curious likely helped in this same regard. I got the feeling from many people, especially those associated with the UVF, that they very much wanted to speak with someone who would be less likely to come in with preconceived biases or notions about who and what they were. The very fact they were willing me meet with me, admittedly arranged through a trusted intermediary, seems to support this conclusion. However, there were also drawbacks.

Although many people appeared thankful for my neutrality and openness, many also wanted to “convert” me to their side. Many wanted an ally, not a neutral observer. I found that in an effort to please them and show my appreciation for their willingness to meet me, I might have acted in ways which indicated I sympathized with them, or structured questions and responses in ways which allowed them leeway on certain subjects and failed to challenge them in critical areas. Whether this was true or not, or if it had any effect on the interviews I may never know; but I suspect the very fact this has come to me as a possible point of distortion indicates it probably had some effect.

Finally, I found that many of those I interviewed assumed I knew little to nothing about the Troubles in Northern Ireland. This was apparent through their explanation of acronyms, brief historical overviews to almost any question about a specific subject and in some cases, direct questioning as to what I actually knew about a given subject. I believe that I may have received more “basic” or simplified answers on some subjects but I do think I successful countered it in most cases by explaining myself and structuring questions and responses to indicate that I knew at least the background of what I was speaking about.
Another potential bias I picked up from my background as an American student was a better understanding and slightly sympathetic take on the IRA and the Republican movement in general. I believe American media and society in general tend to side with Republicanism in the Northern Ireland conflict and engender this view in the public as a result. I think this has much to do with the American sense of tossing off colonial rulers (especially Britain) and championing the case of democracy. However, as even a brief study of the Troubles will show, the reality of the situation is anything but that straightforward or simple. Still, my understanding of Loyalism and its related politics and paramilitaries were limited and likely biased before I arrived. I do not believe that any of that bias remains, but it is always possible. It is also a danger that in an effort to compensate for this bias, I gave undue or undeserved leniency to the Loyalist position.

Finally, as a student and due to my personality, I am a problem solver. I usually approach a project with the desire and intention on ending with a set of suggestions for a generating a solution. I think that my schooling as has taught me to approach most academic material in a similar manner, with presenting, proving and/or defending a thesis about a particular situation, event, or problem. As I stated in the foreword, this project is not necessarily about generating solutions or definite truths. I will offer some suggestions, solutions and critics in this paper, but I will try to let the experiences and interviews speak for themselves. This requires the reader to approach this paper with the intent of locating these messages as they will not always be specifically spelled out.
The Experiences

My experiences in regards to this project were somewhat limited and quite often a bit removed from the direct topic. Due to the sensitive nature of the UVF in terms of its publicity, it was not possible to “hang out” or have informal time with its members. Obviously, it also would not have been ethical for me to get an experience of violence by participating in it, or possible for me to become a part of politics given my outsider status and limited time. If I had more time to develop this project, I believe valuable insight could be gained through experience on a more personal and local level however. Given my ability to scratch the surface of the UVF and Loyalists communities within a few weeks, I imagine a greater period of time spent becoming known and trusted by these groups would lead to more casual and experiential opportunities.

Experiential learning was not, however, a complete wash. I did see, hear, and participate in a number of activities outside my interviews which added significantly to the context of my time in Northern Ireland and my approach/understanding of my project topic. During my entire stay in Belfast, I kept a journal documenting a variety of events I thought were significant and influential in and on my time there. Since this paper is not meant to be a complete overview of my four weeks I do limited amounts in connecting my everyday experience to the project itself. However, In Appendix A, the reader can find the full content of my journal. I suggest reading this after the paper and seeing how it adds to, detracts from, and influences the content of this work.
The Interviews

As is likely apparent by this point, my interviews make up the bulk of information in the paper itself. There are several reasons for this. First, I was pleasantly surprised at the access I had to a wide variety of people with extensive knowledge and personal experience on my topic. I had worried that finding and gaining access to these people would prove difficult and was happy when it did not. Second, once I began interviewing more and more doors opened to me. The person I was interviewing would often put me in contact with another individual they believed would be beneficial to consult. Although this did offer the problem of becoming loaded with one particular perspective from people with similar ideologies and backgrounds, I thought it was also telling as to the openness and ideology of the person I was dealing with in terms of who they recommended I speak with. Third, I felt most comfortable in the formal interviewing process. It was relatively easy to call up someone, explain who I was and what I was doing, then request a time to speak with them. Finally, I thought that since this project was about gaining a variety of perspectives, attempting to interview a variety of people was not only a good way to go about it but also prudent in terms of time management.

There are drawbacks to my interview process of which the reader should be aware. Most interviews were done as a matter of convenience and not on the basis of selecting the most diverse range of subjects. If an opportunity presented itself I took it instead of devoting my time and energy to getting a wider bases of interviewees. I entered each interview with a generated set of questions. Especially for the first few interviews, I thought this helped me to stay more focused and also present myself in a
more articulate and clear fashion. However, this formalized the interviews even more and also likely constrained the type of questions and how I asked them. In later interviews, I did leave my “script” in order to pursue topics of interest which were brought up or clarify points, but the generated questions did still direct the interviews. As these interviews were so formal, it raises the question as to whether what I was given was a formulated “party” response or what that individual truly believed. Especially since I was dealing with a number of groups and parties which had to be careful of their public appearance due to the nature of their work, I suspect that personal views on some subjects were withheld.

The reader should also be keenly aware that my interviewees in no way necessarily represent the entirety of the communities, groups, parties, and organizations I speak about. In fact, the likelihood is that I am missing significant and large portions of the Loyalist community, Unionist political parties, and the UVF. Again, some of this lack is due to availability and time constraints. Also, as Dominic Bryan rightly pointed out to me, while many of those I interviewed are well known, very intelligent, and generally quite progressive, they may not, and in fact are likely not, completely representative of any large group. Still, many were politicians, community leaders, or people in leadership positions which seems to indicate at the very least that they do have enough similarities to those they represent to hold, or can create through other means, the support that elevated them to the positions they are in currently. In the end, this paper requires me to make some generalizations which may not be appropriate or correct. In those cases, I apologize and I hope to one day have the time and resources to sort out
these discrepancies. Until then, I leave it up to my reader to bare in mind these drawbacks.

The logistics of each interview were quite similar. I held ten formal interviews with nine different individuals (Chris Hudson was interviewed twice). All interviews were held in at place and time chosen by the interviewee. I tape recorded the vast majority of the interviews and have provided transcriptions in Appendix B. Written notes were also taken at all the interviews. Time of each interview ranged from half an hour to about an hour and a half. Informal interviews occurred in a number of locations, but mostly involved taxi drivers who were a wealth of opinions and knowledge which I found terribly helpful. Accounts of these informal interviews can be found in my observation and experience journal in Appendix A.

To give the reader a better understanding of those I interviewed I will provide a brief profile of each interviewee. However, it is important that if the reader wants to acquire a more full picture of these individuals, they consult Appendix B and the transcriptions.

**Tom Roberts:** Mr. Roberts is the director of the Ex-Prisoner Interpretative Center (EPIC). EPIC is an organization dedicated to addressing the needs of ex-prisoners from the Loyalist community and their families, especially in the Shankill Road region. However, it is also involved in numerous cross community projects, community activism, research initiatives, and providing a medium through which to involve ex-prisoners in the peace process. Mr. Roberts himself was once a member of the UVF and served a thirteen-year prison sentence from 1980-1993 for his involvement. Mr. Roberts and his
writings/speeches are also found in much of the recent literature about ex-prisoners, their rights and status, and Loyalists involved in the peace process.

**Christopher Stalford:** Mr. Stalford is a member of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and is currently serving as a Belfast City Councilor for the Sandy Row area. His family were originally supporters of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) until the referendum on the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998 when they switched their support to the DUP. Mr. Stalford is also a member of the Sandy Row Orange Lodge and the Free Presbyterian church and attends services at the Martyr’s Memorial Church of Dr. Ian Paisley.

**David Ervine:** Mr. Ervine is currently a MLA for the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) in East Belfast as well as a Belfast City Councilor for the same party. He was once a member of the UVF and served a prison sentence for his involvement in this organization during which time he met Gusty Spence and became interested in education and politics. The PUP does still maintain open contact with the UVF offering the group political analysis and Mr. Ervine is a key figure in this process. However, he is in no way in control of the UVF and holds no influence over the group other than what respect and currency they decide to assign his political analysis. Mr. Ervine was also a key player in the peace process leading up to the Loyalist ceasefire of 1994 and the GFA of 1998. Although not a unanimous opinion by all in Northern Ireland, Mr. Ervine is considered to be one of the most progressive, intelligent, articulate, and influential figures in the region by many, especially those I spoke with.
Dawn Purvis: Mrs. Purvis is a member of the PUP and was also recently appointed to the Policing Board of Northern Ireland. She is considered to be very well spoken and intelligent as a politician and community worker by a number of individuals I spoke with although most also point out that she may be more liberal in her ideology then many of those she represents. She was born and raised in Belfast and has experienced the Troubles first hand, with her housing being destroyed by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) in 1992.

Henry McDonald: Mr. McDonald is from Northern Ireland but has spent quite a bit of time in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) as well as England and much of Europe. He is originally from a Catholic Nationalist background but describes his thinking on these subjects as having changed significantly over the years. At one point, he was a member of a punk band. He is currently the Ireland editor of The Observer newspaper, has written a number of books including UVF and UDA about Loyalist paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland, was the BBC security correspondent in Northern Ireland during much of the later part of the Troubles, and has worked with Chris Hudson in an effort to understand and accurately portray Loyalist paramilitary groups, especially the UVF. He currently lives in East Belfast.

William “Billy” Newman: Mr. Newman is a project coordinator with the John McMichael Center on Sandy Row. The Center is active as community group which conducts a number of projects related to community development and also works with ex-prisoners and current members of the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) to resolve conflicts in manners which minimize violence and seek to promote cooperation and
understanding. He is very much involved with Jackie McDonald, a current Brigadier General of the UDA in the Sandy Row area.

**UVF Command Staffers:** Due to the sensitive nature of this interview, I cannot disclose many details about these individuals and was given only limited information about them. What can be said is that the gentleman I spoke with most has been an active member of the UVF since 1966 and now works extensively with Henry McDonald and Chris Hudson in efforts to stand down this organization. Chris Hudson also credits him with playing an influential role in introducing and maintaining the Loyalist ceasefire of 1994. Henry McDonald credits him with being the “brains” behind much of the UVF policy which has been enacted since the mid-1990s and having been especially influential throughout the peace process.

**Roy Garland:** Mr. Garland is a member of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). He is currently a member of the party executive, which is the governing body of that group, and also works as a constituency worker for Michael McGimpsey in the Sandy Row area. Mr. Garland has written a biography of Gusty Spence, a leader within the UVF in the 1960s and 1970s and a person credited with instilling political motivation in many prisoners during his time in Long Kesh (the Maze) prison. Some individuals described Mr. Garland as a progressive and forward thinking voice in the UUP, but not always representative of the general Unionist population and quite often ahead of his time.

**Chris Hudson:** Mr. Hudson was born and raised in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) in a Catholic Nationalist family. He lost his Catholic faith in his teenage years and spent much of his early adulthood as a hairdresser in England. At this time, he became
interested in politics and described himself as a very left leaning communist. However, he would eventually fall out with the communist message and turn to work as a labor union organizer and representative. Through this work he became somewhat familiar with working class Protestant areas in Northern Ireland as well as with David Ervine. These connections resulted in him beginning to meet with members of the UVF in the context of trying to convince them to critically examine their position and what it would take to introduce a ceasefire and then enter the peace process. Since the late 1980s to the present, Chris Hudson has acted as the primary contact between the government of the ROI and the UVF, as well as a negotiator for and with the UVF. Mr. Hudson is credited by David Ervine and the UVF members I met with as not only having saved hundreds of lives, but also playing an enormous role in facilitating the ceasefire of 1994, its continuation through the PIRA breaking its ceasefire, and helping to guide and advise the peace process generally. These views are shared by a number of authors including Henry Sinnerton and Henry McDonald.

Miscellaneous Important Disclaimers

There are several other points and warning about this paper which are important for the reader to know in order to view the project in a proper context. First, I suffered from a lack of direction and focus throughout much of the project, especially before meeting with my project advisor Dr. Dominic Bryan. The result was a wide spectrum of questions being covered in every interview, often asked in a succession such that it was not conducive to creating a congruent or coherent flow. Some of those I interviewed may not have been clear on what I was trying to find out, and thus were more broad and
scattered in their answers. Follow up interviews, once I had a better focus to my project and questioning would probably have proven very helpful, but due to time constraints were simply not possible. However, I did gather a very wide range of helpful material which covers topics indirectly related with violence, politics, Unionism and the UVF, in addition to some subjects completely, or seemingly so, unrelated in nature. Again, the Appendixes are worth reading for this information.

Second, I use the term “Loyalist paramilitary” quite often in my questioning and also at points in this paper. When I began this project I planned to write about both the UVF and the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) in regards to the experience of violence and politics in Loyalist paramilitaries. However, it quickly became apparent that these two groups are quite different from one another on numerous levels, including their feelings on, and successes and failures relating to, violence and politics. I want to emphasis that except in some limited circumstances the UVF and UDA are not the same organization and should not be generalized as such. In my research, I became far more acquainted with the UVF not only in academic writings, but also in those contacts I made. Thus at the time of writing, I decided to focus solely on the UVF except in some very specific cases. However, my questioning was often based widely and generally around Loyalist paramilitaries, and the responses I received may at times have been directed at the UDA or both the UDA and UVF, rather than just the UVF.

Also, the paramilitary experience often differed from region to region in Northern Ireland. I was based solely in Belfast, and those I spoke with were speaking from this perspective as well. It is true that much of the activity of the paramilitary organizations
were directed and “assigned” from Belfast, in addition to occurring there, but this does not mean that what stands as fact for the Belfast UVF also stands for a different battalion or company in another area (even within Belfast itself). I will do my best to avoid making generalizations between the two in this paper, but the reader should be aware that my focus is on the UVF and not the UDA, although my questioning does not directly reflect this which may create some discrepancies. The reader should also assume that I am talking specifically about the UVF in Belfast, and those members associated with the groups I spoke with, unless I mention otherwise.

Third, I will talk about violence and acts of incredible brutality in general and at best neutral terms throughout this paper. Some readers might be offended by this “callous” or “barbaric” stance, but I ask that judgment be made only after considering the following. I am not seeking to judge people in this project. I hope to take what they told me, compare it to my research and other interviews, and point to similarities, differences, inconsistencies, and potential points for education and advancement. The fact that I am trying to remain objective does not mean I do not deplore what some individuals advocate and have committed in terms of violent and political acts. However, as I point out in the foreword and introduction of this paper, I am also seeking to challenge instant condemnation of violence without first looking to examine and understand acts that are repulsive and offense to may in their very nature. To do so, I must also hold myself to the same standard of trying to understand that which I might otherwise immediately reject. This does not mean the reader, or myself, should accept or support the
philosophies or actions in question, but that we should base our rejection and condemnation on the strongest possible arguments.

Finally, I will assume and expect at the very least a basic knowledge of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. This is not a paper which should be read as an introduction to Loyalist paramilitaries, the UVF, Loyalism and Unionism, and least of all the Troubles in general. This project was undertaken after several months of intense study and examination of the Troubles on a variety of levels. I would recommend that a reader seek to at least have a solid background understanding of the conflict, its various players and developments before reading this piece.

Essentially, what I want from my readers is an understanding that this is a somewhat controversial work in progress. I have not addressed all of the Loyalists community, let alone much of the Unionist community or any of the Republican and Nationalist communities. I consulted very few academics and professors personally even when they were recommended to me by various sources. I have left out an entire paramilitary organizations on both sides of the sectarian divide. Although I will make some conclusions and offer some analysis, it is speculative at best, given what I have been able to do. If we are ever to understand a topic as broad as violence, politics and paramilitaries, many more viewpoints will be needed, in addition to years of analysis and consultation from and with a variety of sources. I invite my readers to once again call into question not only what I say, but also what I do not say and what was said to me. It is through such careful reading and questioning that projects like this will prove especially helpful to those who read them.
Introduction:

Conflict resolution as an objective often pits violence and peace against one another as mutually exclusive options. In terms of definitions peace is usually described at the very least as the absence of violence. However, are peace and violence mutually exclusive or far more interconnected than one might initially suppose? Can violence bring about peace? It seems this is the very idea of violence in the form of war. As Dawn Purvis said to me, “Soldiers fight wars to bring peace, so at some point the war has to end and peace has to be made.” Through an examination of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) I have come to believe that a greater understanding of violence in relationship to politics and peace leads one to believe that peace and violence are far more interconnected and related than one may care to imagine.

The UVF is an organization whose existence has encompassed a drastic change in tactics, strategy, and objectives within the conflict of Northern Ireland. The group as changed from a secret paramilitary organization with limited objectives and coherent strategy, to a larger, politically minded, paramilitary group which attempts to balance violence and politics while simultaneously working to disband itself. This has not been an easy or logical progression but one that I believe can offer insight into the relationship between politics, peace and violence.

Very few people have ever made the claim that violence is the desired outcome of a particular situation or conflict. This implies peace is the preferred outcome. However, I believe that the experience of the UVF shows that violence is not excluded from the peace process, and can even play an important role within it. Violence can assume the
position of political motivator, vehicle of justice and retribution, voice of the unheard or under-represented, and a means by which to highlight and change social conditions which produce violence. An active exploration of violence and its relationship with politics is useful then in developing more realistic, practical, and successful methods for resolving that which inhibits peace. The UVF is a good case study as this group has undertaken numerous strategies and tactics within both politics and violence, all in a bid to reach a particular set of ends, which involve the peaceful continuation of the society of which this organization is a part.

Violence is usually deplored and condemned but little more, and seldom ever enough, is done to understand the very thing peace activists are striving to eradicate. A casual dismissal of violence is potentially deadly to any peace process, and at the very least can significantly slow it down. The very fact that violence repulses most people and is identified as something to be avoided, seems to indicate that a careful examination of situations where individuals and organizations go against these norms is valuable in preventing and addressing the conditions which gave rise to the violence. The UVF and its attempts to influence and direct the political and peace processes of Northern Ireland are a good example of the dangers and delays associated with a casual dismissal of the complex role which violence has to play in both.

**Body:**

**History and Timeline of the UVF**

The UVF as an organization has its roots in the Ulster region of the island of Ireland long before the Troubles ever occurred, or the Republic of Ireland (ROI) was ever
established. The original Ulster Volunteer Force was created by Sir Edward Carson in 1912 although elements had already begun to come together in 1911. It was established for the purpose of resisting the proposed Home Rule legislation which was being debated in Westminster at the time. The group consisted mostly of Protestants who opposed Home Rule for Ireland which they saw as at the very least as a step towards establishing a Catholic Irish state. The group was made up of primarily working class citizens, but did receive a large degree of support from the middle and upper classes in terms of leadership and financing. Their objective was to defeat the Home Rule legislation by creating an army which would take over the northern counties of Ireland in the event of Home Rule being established. It is estimated that the UVF had tens of thousands of soldiers and was well armed especially by 1914. (The Red Hand, 8-10).

World War One interrupted the question of Irish Home Rule and armed rebellion lead by the UVF as a result. To enlist the help of this group in fighting Germany, the British government promised that Home Rule would not come into effect until after the war. The 36th Ulster Division was formed and many of the UVF soldiers joined its ranks. They were a notoriously well-trained and skilled fighting group winning particular distinction during the Battle of the Somme in 1916 when they were one of the only groups to achieve their objective and at a terribly high cost of life. To this day, the Battle of the Somme and the 36th Ulster Division’s role in WWI are important symbols and reminders of the devotion and sacrifice to Britain many Ulster Protestants feel (although a number of Catholics also served in this division as well and are remembered proudly). As a reward for this sacrifice, Ireland was partitioned with six counties of Ulster
remaining part of Britain and the other twenty-six counties forming the Irish Home Rule state in 1920 (The Red Hand, 10-11).

After this, the UVF largely ceased to exist as an organization although large numbers of its members stayed active in “defending Ulster” through organizations like the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). As civil war rocked the ROI and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) began to mount a campaign to regain the six counties which now were Northern Ireland, many Protestants began to feel that state security forces were not enough to protect them or the region and a call was put out by some to reform the UVF. However, the response ended up being the formation of the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC) which was a state run and funded organization designed to supplement the security efforts of the police. Eventually, Ulster and the ROI were deemed stable and safe enough that the USC could be retired except one category of Special Constables, the B Specials, to supplement the RUC (The Red Hand, 11-13).

In 1966, there began to be rumors of a new organization drilling and training with automatic weapons in the border areas of Northern Ireland. Soon a number of murders targeting Catholics and members of the Republican movement began to occur. One of those arrested early on in connection with these crimes was Augustus “Gusty” Spence, a former British soldier from Ulster with strong family connections to Protestant associations like the Orange Order (a Protestant group dedicated to preserving and promoting Protestantism and its traditions) as well as the B Specials. The Home Rule Minister for Northern Ireland Terence O’Neill announced that a new group had formed itself, taking on the title of the Ulster Volunteer Force, but was dedicated now to
paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland against “helpless and innocent civilians” and as such was made an illegal organization. (The Red Hand, 14-15).

The illegal status did little to stop the growth of the UVF. As IRA violence around the region increased, and Protestants became more unsettled about the status of Northern Ireland as part of Britain, support began to rise for organizations which were seen to be more capable of defending Northern Ireland than states forces such as the RUC. In fact, as UVF and IRA violence increased and intensified with the backdrop of the civil rights campaign, Terence O’Neill was forced to resign as he was seen to be “too soft” and capitulating with Catholics and the Republican movement. Upon resigning in 1969, O’Neill said, “Either we live peace or we have no life worth living.” Northern Ireland would not know peace for almost the next thirty years with paramilitary groups like the UVF and IRA undertaking violent campaigns to further a variety of political, personal and ideological ends but all of which centered around the constitutional status of Northern Ireland (Cusak and McDonald, 28)

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the UVF aim was to take the fight on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland to the ROI. This was done largely through bombing electrical sub-stations and other public works in an attempt to dissipate the ROI’s actions regarding the increasing unrest in Northern Ireland as they were seen to be sympathetic to Republicans and Catholics (Cusak and McDonald, 29-31). At this point the group was still largely secretive and small, but that was soon to change. As violence continued to increase and Protestant working class communities felt progressively more under attack, the British government appeared paralyzed in its responses, so more and
more support was given to organizations like the UVF in their campaign to defend these communities and take the fight to the Republicans. The UVF tried to remain a more discrete and selective group, allowing community defense associations to form which would eventually be combined into the Ulster Defense Association (UDA), another Loyalist paramilitary organization (The Edge of the Union, 3-4). However, even the UVF began to grow substantially, and with growth came the ability and willingness to do more, “For God and Ulster” as the group’s motto states.

What followed was a period stretching from the early 1970s through the 1980s of increased paramilitary violence on the part of all paramilitaries active at the time, including the UVF. UVF killing during this time fluctuated between targeted murders of IRA members and supports as well as those associated with the Republican and Nationalist movements, and the killing of innocent civilians with minimal, if any, ties to the Republican movement other than their being Catholic (Cusack and McDonald, 120-124). As the UVF became more prominent and active, support for the organization and its tactics throughout Northern Ireland began to fluctuate. Many Loyalist communities wholeheartedly supported what they saw to be their community defenders while others viewed them as little different in tactical or moral terms than the IRA. Particularly brutal murders committee by groups like the Shankill Butchers, and murders that were increasingly wanton, untargeted and sectarian decreased support for the organization even within its own communities, but was counteracted by similar actions on the part of the IRA and Irish National Liberation Army (INLA).
Increased violence brought increased attention in the form of policing by the British. As the UVF was fighting to support Britain, this made it difficult to counteract policing measures against it, as violence against police and army would not be well received in most cases. Also, there have been constant allegations of collusion between state forces and the UVF throughout the group’s existence, but most often when it executed a “job” which seemed to be out of its league or capability. The UVF also struggled to find support outside of Northern Ireland in the form of groups and individuals willing to supply them with money and arms. Unlike the IRA, the UVF found it difficult to find those who were willing to support them ideologically. The ability to fight as pro-state terrorists and find support for its operations would plague the UVF through its entire existence as a paramilitary group, unlike its original form in the early 1900s.

The 1970s and 1980s also saw the group’s first experiments with politics. The UVF first entered the realm of politics with the Ulster Loyalist Front (ULF) in 1973. This group would promote, through Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) Hugh Smyth, the right of Ulster Loyalists to bear weapons in defense of the region, prisoner rights and release, worker’s rights, and the defeat of the IRA. All of this would be done through law and politics. Issues such as prisoner release, socio-economic discrepancies between classes, and the constitutional status of Northern Ireland would be reoccurring themes in the political efforts of the UVF. Political moves were often encouraged by ceasefires or a reduction in violence, but if they were deemed to have stalled or damaged the Unionist/Loyalist position, often resulted in violent campaigns of an even greater
magnitude. A good example of this exchange is found in the actions of the UVF in relationship to the Sunningdale Agreement (Cusak and McDonald, 126, 129-132). This period is an excellent time to examine how the UVF tried to balance violence with politics, and what events precipitated support for one or the other.

From the mid 1980s into the early 1990s, it became clear that the UVF was looking for a way to end its campaign of violence. Although violence remained at intense levels (often times being much more deadly and effective given the experience and skills which had now been acquired), the UVF became more vocal in its political aspirations and its desired role in a peace process through the Volunteer Political Party (VPP) which would eventually become the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP). Often consisting of candidates who were former prisoners who had been imbued with a new sense of political ideology through the education efforts of Gusty Spence and others in the prison system this would be the first major “successful” political campaign linked to the UVF. These groups were not associated with the UVF’s military campaign, but did seek to represent the political aspirations of its members, offer political analysis, and help the organization become involved in the peace process. A major development was also the efforts on behalf of the ROI and UVF through Chris Hudson to open channels of communication so that a better understanding could be reached, which would hopeful facilitate a reduction in violence.

The was also the time when internal fractures began to occur around issues regarding continued campaigns of violence, the UVF’s role in the peace process, and other politically contentious positions. Billy “King Rat” Wright, a notorious operator
within the UVF would eventually disagree so much with the rest of the UVF Command Staff that he would break away from the UVF to form the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF). During this time tensions between the UDA and UVF would also begin to show through in feuding over territory and influence, as well as disagreements about what constituted legitimate targets, and what methods (violent or political) were most effective. However, the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) which was comprised of the UVF and UDA would continue to work together to provide a united and congruent Loyalist paramilitary front on both the military and political fronts.

The mid 1990s to 2000 were dominated by major events and developments in the Northern Ireland peace process. Ceasefires by Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries began to look like really possibilities. The UVF was open and willing to enter a ceasefire but was hard pressed to do so before the IRA campaign was ended. Shortly after the IRA ceasefire of 1994 was declared, the CLMC announced its own ceasefire in the interest of developing a political peace process which could deliver lasting peace to Northern Ireland. The Omagh and Canary Wharf bombings by the IRA, which ended their ceasefires, and retaliatory violence on the part of the UDA and other Loyalist paramilitaries jeopardized the entire process, but the UVF did manage to preserve its ceasefire. The result was a peace process being initiated which indirectly involved the UVF through the PUP. The Good Friday Agreement (GFA) produced and ratified in 1998 singling a time period of significantly reduced violence on the part of paramilitaries across the board, and initiated the process of disbanding (and in some cases decommissioning) these groups, including the UVF.
However, events since 2000 have put pressure on not only the disbanding and standing down process of the paramilitary organizations, but also the peace process in general. Infighting within the Loyalist paramilitaries often spilled over into open street violence. The UVF embarked on a campaign to “clean up” what it deemed to be a dangerous and violent group in the LVF. Because of the connections of the LVF to elements of the UDA and tensions already existing between the UVF and UDA on the peace process, territorial control, and local disagreements, a feud between the two organizations exploded on the Shankill Road in 2001, and continues in a suppressed form to this day. A result is a substantially slow down in the disbandment process of the UVF.

The politics of the UVF have also suffered. Support for the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), a party which firmly stands against paramilitary involvement in the governance of Northern Ireland in any form and is unhappy with the GFA, has grown significantly and even found support in communities representative of the UVF and its members. The PUP has experienced a major loss of public support, dropping from three MLAs to just one in the National Assembly. Prisoners released under the GFA are still denied political prisoner status which carries difficult financial and social implications with it. Increased levels of crime associated with the paramilitaries have also attracted negative public scrutiny from a variety of sources and discredited these organizations in the public eye making many unwilling to support them in any political or community activities they undertake.

The preceding has been a very abbreviated history of the UVF and its tactics, policies and strategies, as well as their results. The information was taken from books by
Jim Cusak, Henry McDonald, Steve Bruce, and Henry Sinnerton listed in the bibliography of this project. A solid understanding of the history of the UVF is crucial to understanding the organization and being able to analyze its actions and policies. Due to space and time constraints, a detailed report on the subject is not possible. However, any of the books listed above, particularly *UVF* by Jim Cusack and Henry McDonald, provide excellent histories of the UVF which the reader would find helpful if they wished to gain further knowledge on the subject.

**Reasons for and criticisms of the UVF’s campaign of violence**

A central question to this project is why the UVF took up a violent campaign? Was there any legitimacy in these reasons? In my interviews, I found a variety of opinions on the subject.

Most former and current UVF members I spoke with told me that a major reason for joining was the sense that they had to defend their communities. Increased campaigns of violence by the PIRA on Protestant working class areas created a demand for defenders and along with the sense that something had to be done in this regard (*The Red Hand*, 39-43). Media reports and constant scenes of violence heightened the sense within particularly the Protestant working class community that it was under attack by the Republican movement, and that anyone could and would be targeted (Sinnerton, 23). Roy Garland of the UUP echoed this sentiment to me, “What has happened is that the working class during the conflict believed that we were under attack by the IRA, so they fought a war as they saw it against the IRA.” David Ervine of the PUP and a former
UVF member described, “When asked why I did what I done, I didn’t know what else to do.” A UVF Commander gave another reason,

“I joined for what now seem to be to be naïve and foolish reasons. Unionist politicians where scare mongering at this time about a potential re-rising of the Irish Republic in association with the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916. I was young, impressionable, and excitable, so I wanted to do something to counter this ‘threat’ and I did through the UVF.”

A related reason given was the desire to strike back or retaliate for actions committed by Republican paramilitaries. Eddie Kinner, a former member of the UVF, credits his decision to join the UVF as “for the purposes of retaliating,” (Reflections on Violence, 7). The UVF Commander describes those joining the UVF in the post 1969 period as seeking revenge against those communities which had committed injustices against their own. With this came a sense that the best defense, and the surest way to get justice, was through violence and attack, in a sense a strong offense. David Ervine describes this mentality as the “arrogance and foolishness of youth” but says it made sense to him in his youth and at the time. In fact the desire for retaliation is one shared not only by members of the UVF, but also the communities which they were purported to serve. Chris Hudson suggested support of the UVF, “In the more working class areas, those on the margins, would see the paramilitaries as their people and acting on their behalf. They might not have immediately or directly agreed with them, but saw them as necessary in getting their retaliation in against Republicans.”

Years of intense interaction and experience with violence and suffering have obviously branded themselves onto the thinking and reasoning of some I spoke with. David Ervine told me about celebrating his 19th birthday as bombs exploded around
Belfast, injuring many and killing another individual named David Ervine who lived not too far from him. All he could think of was that it could just as easily have been him who was killed. Dawn Purvis, although never member of a paramilitary organization, related stories to me about how growing up in a society where soldiers kicking down your door and taking you out to the street because there was a bomb nearby seemed to be a normal occurrence. Through the stories I heard, and the destruction and damage caused by sectarian violence I witnessed first hand on Sandy Row and the Shankill, I began to question my own ability to resist joining a paramilitary organization and engaging in violence in such a situation.

Others go even further by using these feelings to make calculated justifications and rationales for the violence and retaliation they and the UVF employed. Tom Roberts stated, “I feel that the justification for Loyalist violence came from the fact that the IRA was inflicting violence on our community as we seen it and we reciprocated in kind.” The problem with this sort of argument is that is assumes a number of things. First, it assumes that it can be determined who acted, or struck first. This very question actually has numerous subsets such as who was struck, what they were struck for, whether the blow was bad enough to deserve retaliation and to what degree, making it far more complicated and subjective than it was in original form. Second, it assumes that members of large groups like the IRA and UVF always follow orders precisely, are in agreement with those orders, and constantly are able to push aside their personal vendettas, biases and feelings. Obviously, as is the case with most groups even outside the UVF, these are impossible to guarantee (The Edge of the Union, 6-9). Besides, it
seemed to me when I was in Belfast that enough animosity exists between Republicans and Loyalists even now, and certainly during the height of the Troubles, to create justification for violent action purely on deep seeded distrust and hatred. To this day, groups like EPIC and its partner group Alternatives work with other community organizations and political parties like the UUP and PUP to address and quell violent outbursts along interface areas which are often sparked over small and seemingly insignificant occurrences. Each of these groups gave me examples of such instances.

The emphasis on retaliation lead to tit for tat killings between Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries which escalated the violence of the Troubles. David Ervine wondered about the influence he had on perpetuation the violence when he questioned, “One of the questions I think that is very painful to try and answer is that if there were an engine that encouraged me, or enhanced my move towards paramilitary involvement, how many engines did I become, or enhancement for young Catholics and Republicans did I create by my actions?” Chris Hudson said that while the UVF never intended to encourage random sectarian killings, it “began to mimic Republican violence and explanations, especially in terms of defining legitimate targets. The UVF saw the PIRA definition of legitimate target as encompassing pretty much the entire Protestant community and then responded in similar ways.”

Many of these accounts have the common characteristics of fear and feeling under attack or threat of attack. I think it is also significant that even the critics of the UVF do not seem to deny this siege mentality. In fact Unionism and the Protestant community are often characterized throughout the Troubles and into the present as feeling under
sieve. The civil rights campaign of the late 1960s and early 1970s was seen to quickly turn from a campaign of “British Rights for British Citizens” into a vehicle for the Republican movement with an objective of Catholic power (Sinnerton, 26). The UVF Commander elaborated and corroborated this view when he said,

“Although the original civil rights protest may have been a different story, I think it is clear now, and I have had several IRA men admit this to me, that the IRA hijacked the movement as a vehicle for the Republican cause. I guess it means that both Loyalists and Republicans were right in how they viewed the civil rights campaign.”

Certainly, the Republican campaign embarked on by the IRA and its associated political party, Sinn Fein was about establishing a united Ireland, thus dissolving the link with Britain, not only destroying a union which Unionists and Protestants valued, but also providing an unacceptable alternative in what was seen to be an exclusive and inhospitable Irish state. Chris Hudson, Roy Garland, David Ervine, and Christopher Stalford all spoke about how they believed the Unionist connection with Britain, while not always articulated in the best manner, is legitimate and positive for the most part. Each also viewed the ROI as historically exclusive to Protestants and Unionists, and even today remained questionable in its willingness and ability to accommodate Protestants who did not consider themselves Irish citizens. Chris Hudson said to me,

“The ROI has always claimed it held no grudge or discriminatory practices against Protestants. For the most part, and especially in the last few decades, I think that is true. However, the ROI needs to ask itself some serious questions in regards to this stance. First, how can it be so certain of this when Protestants make up only three percent of its population? Second, how is it treating new immigrant populations and is this something that could be seen to represent how it would treat a larger Protestant population? Finally, why is it that if the ROI is so accepting of Protestants, the vast majority of them feel they must live in a tiny corner of the island which isn’t part of the ROI?”
Even outsiders can be subject to this siege mentality, which appears to manifest itself through a certain level of distrust and closed community in many Loyalist areas. During my time on the Shankill Road and Sandy Row people of a variety of ages would often stare at me suspiciously. I certainly stuck out in this environment given my backpack, dress and occasional use of a camera to take pictures of the area, but the attention I received I believe was of a kind and degree attributable to a community with a long tradition of feeling under attack, and thus being suspicious of outsiders. It would take me getting the opportunity to introduce and explain myself before people would open up to me in most situations. However, I believe this siege mentality may be dissipating somewhat as people did become accustomed to my presence and at times were quite inquisitive and open with me.

The break in ranks seems to come when the question of how to address the threat of violence is asked. Northern Ireland has and has always had an established police force throughout the Troubles in the RUC and Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), along with the British Army and its special branch in the Ulster Defense Regiment (UDR). With these legal and thus more legitimate options available, it has always been hard for the UVF to justify its existence. This is the crux of the problem facing groups which participate in what Bruce defines as pro-state terror, or illegitimate and unsanctioned uses of force to support a government body and/or system. Bruce says,

“The modern state claims for itself a monopoly of coercion. The anti-state group has a relatively simple and sensible task. The power of the state is such that it is very unlikely to win, but, provided enough members of the subordinate population are sufficiently alienated from the state, an organization using violence to destroy the state can prosper…In contrast, the project of pro-state terrorism is far less simple and far from sensible…If the government does a little blind eye
turning, the pro-state terror group is advantaged, but if the government insists on maintaining its monopoly on coercion, the pro-state organization is in the position of the corner store competing with the multinational,” (*The Red Hand*, 287).

However, many of those I spoke with made it clear they did not see the state forces as being able, and sometimes willing, to defend the communities from which the members of the UVF came. For Tom Roberts, his decision to join the UVF was not only fueled by the fact that several of his friends who were part of the security forces were injured and killed in Republican attacks, but that he felt the UVF was better able to carry out a campaign against the IRA as it did not have the same restraints and pressures on it as the security forces. He also pointed to the hypocrisy of many of those, even in his own family but also in the greater Unionist community, in supporting the “state sanctioned slaughter and repression of people” but not when it was done by the UVF. The UVF Commander pointed out,

“For me the very fact that many members of the security forces were also members of paramilitaries points to the fact that legal measures were limited in what they could do against the IRA. The security forces were not going to be effective against the IRA if they were handcuffed in their efforts. Obviously, the UVF does not have that problem.”

Bruce points out “there is (or at least was) a suspicion in Loyalist and wider Unionist circles that the government is not trying to win (the war against the IRA),” (*The Edge of the Union*, 47).

This mistrust and suspicion extends to within the Unionist community as well. Some people were of the opinion that mainstream Unionists (those who typically vote for the UUP and DUP, are from middle class or affluent status, and do not support paramilitaries on any side) had used, abused, and abandoned the Loyalist community in regards to the UVF. Tom Roberts said, “Mid-Unionists (the DUP and UUP primarily)
are hypocrites and have abandoned, sold out and turned against the very Loyalists they formally encouraged and supported.” The accusation of mid-Unionists encouraging and using groups like the UVF is one which is hotly contested. Christopher Stalford told me, “First thing I would say is that the Ulster Unionist Party and the DUP aren’t in any way linked to paramilitary organizations.” In the academic community, the issue of just how much encouragement and support was given to Loyalist paramilitaries is heavily debated. Early actions and involvement by individuals like Dr. Paisley with groups like the Ulster Protestant Volunteers (UPV) whose membership consisted of many UVF members, raises questions about how divorced mid-Unionists have been from the UVF. However, this support certainly did not extend into the political, financial, or direct membership realms. For an extensive look at this topic, see Bruce’s *The Red Hand*.

The UVF Commander summarized the connection between the UVF and more mainstream Unionist politicians as such, “Unionism has largely used and abused the UVF for its own political gains. We have been the big stick in the mentality that, ‘You can either work with us, or deal with them.’ However, when we made good on that threat through violence, we were almost completely abandoned, and absolutely so publicly.” Dawn Purvis said of the DUP’s and UUP’s unwillingness to work with the UVF or groups like the PUP associated with it, “It’s double speak, you know, it is total hypocrisy. At one time they were totally associated, they couldn’t get any closer in the bed beside them.” During my time in Belfast, Reverend Kennaway, a Presbyterian minister and member of the Orange Order I had met with earlier in my travels, published a book detailing various things he saw as shortcomings and flaws with the management of the
Orange Order. One of these he details in depth is the use of UVF and UDA protection teams for Orange Order parades. The Orange Order and other “legitimate” groups have denied thoroughly having any involvement with the paramilitaries, but there seems to be a body of evidence to suggest otherwise, and even that members of the UVF and other paramilitaries may have been joint members of these organizations (Kennaway, 10-11). According to members of the Orange Order on Sandy Row, not only is Kennaway not correct in these opinions, but he is also in serious trouble with the organization.

Some also suggest that violence was a medium through which those that were unheard or under represented in the political process could have their voices heard. Ken Gibson, founder of the VPP said that the violent men his party represented had a voice that must be heard. These were men who were not just gunmen, but enlightened citizens of Ulster who wanted to create peace but had to be heard. If political structures in Northern Ireland could not create peace, or would not give credence to their positions, then they would have no choice but to fight for it (Cusak and McDonald, 143-144). The UVF Commander expressed his opinion to me that by fighting, and escalating the Troubles in Northern Ireland, organizations like the UVF had prevented the British government taking “the easy road out” by simply acquiescing to the demands for a united Ireland against the wishes of the Protestant majority. He also pointed out that, “It wasn’t the intention, but I believe violence probably made politicians on both sides compromise on subjects and at speeds they otherwise would not have.”

David Ervine pointed to political distancing that had occurred throughout the Troubles and into today, “This ‘Loyalist paramilitary’ label almost makes them apart
from the society from which they come which clearly does not make any sense. They are
from the communities which make up Northern Ireland and yet somehow they are an
illusionary process that Nationalists, Unionists, and above all the media seek to set apart,
but of course they are not apart, they are very much a part there of.”  Christopher Stalford
made his distinction between those in the Unionist mainstream and groups like the UVF
and its supporters by saying,

“Unionists believe in the rule of law and believe in non-violent political methods.
I don’t like the use of the word Loyalist to describe paramilitaries because I think
that demeans the word Loyalist. Loyalists are loyal to the Queen and they are
loyal to the United Kingdom and as such abide by the rule of law and respect the
rule of law. People that have taken the word Loyalist to describe themselves are
not necessarily loyal to anything other than…some of them I think it is a question
of lining their pocket with ill gotten gains from crime. I think the main distinction
that can be draw between parties like the DUP and the Ulster Unionists on one
hand and the PUP and UPRG on the other is that mainstream Unionists believe in
the rule of law and that the police, the army, and the institutions of the state are
the sole arbiters of law and order, the sole route by which justice can be
dispensed.”

The interesting point is that it makes little difference which position ends up being correct
as it is perceived to be the case by almost every former and current paramilitary member I
spoke with that this sort of political disassociation and under representation has occurred
and continues to occur. The UVF Commander stated, “Perceptions are almost always
more important than the truth so what people have perceived as the reasons behind the
violence at various times have always taken precedence over the actually facts.”

Political disenfranchisement, defense, retaliation, a sense of not knowing what to
do (flight or fight), the feeling that security forces were unable and or unwilling to protect
them and their communities, encouragement and support from a variety of sources, and a
true and deep seated fear of a united Ireland all seem to have played a part in why the
UVF mounted its campaign of violence during the Troubles. There are other reasons which I was given as well for the violence, and especially the more criminal violence which is occurring presently. However, I will discuss criminality in more depth later, and the reader should examine the transcriptions in Appendix B for more full and detailed accounts on the subject of violence by each individual. David Ervine also posed the question to me, “Why do people hate people they don’t know?” which I believe strikes at a number of psychological questions as to how and why individuals are willing to commit violence against one another. Unfortunately, I have not the time, space, or knowledge required to delve into these topics.

The move from violence towards politics: motivations, successes and difficulties

Speaking about the move of the UVF from violence to politics is difficult and somewhat misleading. Many people do not consider the UVF to have made the move at all. When explaining my project to the host family of another student who I was studying with, the mother replied, “The UVF has moved from violence to politics? I think they are still pretty violent.” Certainly there are elements of this organization which still do employ violence for various reasons. I will discuss these instances later in this section.

The other slightly misleading part is that many UVF members and ex-members are not politicians or politically active. Also, the UVF as an organization does not see itself as a political group, and certainly does not field political candidates. Reasons for this will be discussed later in the section. However, I do believe a conscious decision was made by the UVF and much of its membership (the precise date is probably impossible to pinpoint) to move away from violence and towards political and peace
processes. It is this move and my interviewees’ opinions on it that I would like to examine.

The first motivation which seems to be significant in inciting this move is the IRA and its cessation of violence in the pursuit of a united Ireland. Tom Roberts stated, “if the IRA are genuine in ceasing their armed struggle and inflicting causalities on our community then we will reciprocate, or at least I would like to think that is what we would and have done. All the evidence has shown this to be the case.” Chris Hudson said that although at points it appeared the UVF may declare a ceasefire before the IRA, it was easier for them to do so afterwards as it fit with their, “You stop, we stop” mentality.

It should be noted though that this motive is shaky at best but was an important one in the thinking of the UVF at the time according to many of those I spoke with. Bruce points out even before the GFA it seemed bizarre for the IRA to stop its campaign of violence when it appears to be winning, or at least to be unbeatable, and equally unlikely that Loyalists paramilitaries like the UVF would accept anything that could be taken as a sign of defeat (The Edge of the Union, 95-97). David Ervine, Dawn Purvis, the UVF Command Staff and Tom Roberts all spoke to me about what a difficult “sell” the GFA was for both Republican and Loyalist communities, as they had to simultaneously convince their respective supporters that they had won. David Ervine pointed to the fact that other Unionist political parties hampered this process, “When the PUP was very, very core to creating the Loyalist ceasefire, the DUP described that ceasefire as, ‘Hard men gone soft.’ That is the same DUP that will give you total vilification of
paramilitaries; but that is the definition that gave it, hard men gone soft. But people don’t seem to remember that.”

With this came a change and drop in community support for the UVF and its violent military campaign. The UVF Command Staff I spoke with were adamant that the UVF had always been of and for the communities from which its members came. Thus, as those communities began to ask for peace and dialogue, the UVF responded accordingly by trying to provide for those requests. Chris Hudson pointed to the fact that throughout the UVF’s existence, the group had been experimenting with politics and political initiatives, and had become quite versed in how the political system would work. According to Hudson,

“They (the UVF) had made the decision that something was happening within the Republican community that would lead to the IRA’s campaign being brought to a closure. They felt they too should be in such a process but weren’t at that point in time. In a way, my job was to help them create this process. It didn’t have a strategic goal as such, other than to bring around a Loyalist ceasefire. But I like to think of myself as a strategic thinker, and I tried to encourage them to do the same so that we could gently and steadily move forward through what was being said. What the UVF needed to know was that there were no secret deals between the Irish government, the British and the IRA, to be sure that they would not stand down only to be forced through back alley deals into a united Ireland.”

The UVF was first able to deliver a ceasefire to allow the political process to proceed without the backdrop of violence and then become a behind the scenes player in the peace process which followed, receiving and critiquing the political analysis given to them by David Ervine and the PUP, and helping to sell and support the GFA when it was produced.

The idea of being community representatives was also a contentious one. Christopher Stalford pointed to the fact that support for political groups associated with
Loyalists paramilitaries met with only limited success even directly following the GFA (which he and others considered to be the “peak” of their support levels) and that support as, “melted away like snow off a ditch.” His assessment of the political success of groups like the PUP is shared by David Ervine, the only remaining MLA for the party out of an original three in the National Assembly. Chris Hudson notes that in his work he has also found that many Loyalist community members who support the UVF as a paramilitary are unwilling to support it politically.

Ervine sees the struggles of the PUP as related to its democratic socialist policies as well as the hesitancy many people have with voting for a party which maintains ties with the UVF. Roy Garland adds that the PUP, although it picks up some cross community and cross class support for its liberal stance and progressive policies, it also loses some of what may be its strongest supporters in the Loyalist community because they hold right leaning positions on social policies and the constitutional issue (such as a feeling the GFA is not longer the appropriate means by which to govern Northern Ireland) and thus vote for other parties like the DUP and occasionally the UUP. Stalford agreed that the DUP offered a consistent and strong position on numerous issues, was seen to be working hard for its constituents, and had broadened its base of support within Loyalist communities as a result. Chris Hudson agrees but sees it as more complex,

“People in Loyalist areas might also be looking at the work done by people like Peter Robinson (the deputy leader of the DUP and an MLA) in East Belfast, which are now quite prosperous and making major strides, and be thinking, ‘Well maybe they will do the same for us.’ There is no doubt that Loyalist areas have suffered from a variety of social ills. I think that the British government may also be trying to maneuver the DUP into governance with Sinn Fein by allowing money to go into Loyalist working class areas through the party, which boosts
their support. At the same time though, I am sure David Ervine is in there trying to get this funding for people as well.”

However, this (politics) is not the only way of the UVF and other paramilitary organizations represent their communities according to some. The UVF Command Staff stated, “Unfortunately, the support for the UVF does not reflect itself in votes. But if you go to a UVF commemoration parade, and you see the streets lined with thousands of people, those people aren’t made to be there and I think it gives you and idea of the sort of support our organization has.” I attended a UVF Battle of the Somme commemoration parade while in Belfast and can attest to the fact that not only were there several dozen “blood and thunder” bands participating (with at least several dozen members each) but there were also thousands of people cheering and lining the streets. Dawn Purvis pointed out that most paramilitary members are and were uncles, brothers, fathers, and friends, not some strangers who had entered the community to fight, so it was hard not to support them on some basic level because you tended to be directly connected to them personally. Both Tom Roberts and Billy Newman gave me numerous examples of how ex-prisoners and even current paramilitary members were having significant impacts on their communities through work at a community and family level. Newman went even further to say, “It is frustrating because often times, at least in this community, community work is well ahead of politics, but politics dictates where funding goes and can have enormous power over people’s thinking about, and reactions to, community work.”

A major point of contention leading up to and during my time in Belfast was criminality committed by Loyalist paramilitaries. The Belfast Telegraph ran several stories over the course of my time documenting the conflict within the leadership of the
UDA over criminality committed and encouraged by some of its members. Since the GFA especially, pressure as been put on politicians, police, and the paramilitaries themselves by the community of Northern Ireland to end criminality within their ranks and criminality has been a key term in political dialogue. Most people regard racketeering, robberies, theft, and punishment beatings to be forms of violence, and while not all involve physical harm being done, it raises the question of what exactly constitutes violence. For the purposes of this paper, and for the society of Northern Ireland though, it is not about technical definitions, but rather what people perceive and believe to be violence which is important.

Dominic Bryan raised two excellent questions in my discussions with him about criminality. How much of this criminality existed throughout the Troubles but was seen to be “politically” motivated and thus acceptable on the part of the community? Does the fact that crime rates have gone up indicate that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) are better able to do their jobs because the paramilitaries are not longer controlling and dealing with community policing, or is there an actual crime increase? Cusack, McDonald, Edwards, and Bloomer in their respective works all point to the fact that activities such as racketeering and robbery have been part of the Loyalist paramilitary experience throughout these organizations’ existences. Not only did these activities generate support within the community (the UVF Commander admitted to me that he believed some support for the UVF may have been due to fear) but it was also necessary for the purchase of weapons, welfare support of prisoners’ families, and a variety of other operations.
Now that the military operations and welfare part of the UVF’s activity is over, the question becomes why that activity continues. Roberts openly admitted that criminality had been and was part of all paramilitary organizations (this admission was significant as the UVF has at times tried to deny it had criminal elements). However, he qualified that by saying that the UVF does not, on any official level, support or condone criminality. Roberts also said,

“No one is saying the criminality is acceptable, but I think that it can be understandable in some cases. If society and the state already label these individuals (ex-combatants and prisoners) are criminals, and if this label prevents many from finding employment and the means to provide for themselves and their families, or adequately do so, it isn’t hard it imagine how some might turn to criminal activity using the training and structures they gained access to in the paramilitaries.”

The UVF Commander agreed with Roberts on his assessment that those who have joined the UVF since the ceasefires, and especially since the GFA tended to be drawn towards the more criminal and gang-like potentials and opportunities afforded by the UVF. He asked that I make sure to mention that the UVF was no longer officially or actively recruiting as a result of this trend, and in an attempt to address the issue of criminality. However, he also argued that the core ranks of the UVF were politically minded, and not intent on becoming criminal Mafia style leaders. According to him,

“I want to make this very clear, the UVF does not sanction or condone criminality on any level, full stop. However, we cannot account for every member of our organization, just like no other group outside the paramilitary realm can do so either. The British government, the Irish government, the political parties of Northern Ireland, the PSNI, all of them have criminal happenings and members but they never receive the same sort of attention because they do not have the background of the UVF, but in actuality the circumstances of that crime are not all that different.”
Others are far more skeptical of the reasons for criminality activity on the part of the UVF and other paramilitaries. Stalford felt very strongly on the subject and I believe his own words summarize his position most accurately,

“Paramilitary organizations continue to exist because it is a very profitable business for the people who are members of them. I think the days of these organizations representing any political ideology or signing up to any particular cause are gone. I think these organizations now are effectively organized crime syndicates and they have evolved into that because of the policies of the British government which allowed their continued existence and allowed them to continue in their criminality. I think that is the main reason that paramilitary organizations continue to blight our society. Particularly on the Loyalist side, businesses are being bleed dry paying protection money, companies are being forced out of business for what? It is not for any Loyalism or any Unionism, it’s for lining the pockets of people who are doing it.”

To an extent David Ervine, Dawn Purvis, Chris Hudson, Henry McDonald, Roy Garland, Tom Roberts, and the UVF Command staff agreed that criminality was a problem and that it was to at least an extent motivated by profit and no specific political or military goal, a consensus which I believe is significant as not many issues came close to that sort unanimity.

Internal and inter-paramilitary feuding in the Loyalist community has also caused a shift from violence of one sort, to violence of another, setting back the ability of these groups to enter the political mainstream. Sinnerton’s biography of Ervine does a good job of covering the feuding between the UDA and UVF which broke out in 2001 and continues to this day. Chris Hudson explained it was the policy of the UVF that it could not allow splinter elements like the Loyalist Volunteer Force to exist as the destruction to the peace process and community they caused would be unacceptable. Although not their preferred method, they were willing to employ violence to achieve these ends. This sort
of disagreement over policy, territory, and power also dominates the feuding between the UDA and UVF and is well documented in not only Sinnerton, but also in its more historically sense is covered in both books by Bruce and recently reexamined by Edwards and Bloomer.

Dawn Purvis, a recent appointee to the Policing Board of Northern Ireland, cautioned me that simply labeling people as criminals had been tried already in the 1970s and 1980s in reference to the UVF and other paramilitaries and had not worked. In fact, all it does is leave people behind to cause further trouble down the road. I wondered if this was hinting that current criminality could be the result of the peace process not being through enough in involving and committing the entire population of Northern Ireland? Although I suspect it is not the direct cause, it may be a subconscious or indirect contributing factor. Mrs. Purvis, given her own personal history as well as involvement with the PUP and the Policing Board is well versed on the subject of criminality in Northern Ireland. I asked her several question regarding that topic and her responses are work examining in Appendix B of this paper.

The UVF has definitely made a commitment to ending its campaign of violence and has taken steps to do so. However, the political aspirations of this group if coherent and unified ones exist, are difficult to extract. David Ervine said to me in talking about the PUP, his status as a politician and how it related to the UVF, “Maybe we aren’t really politicians at all. Maybe we are just paramilitaries who came out of the darkness…having come out of the darkness we don’t want anyone to follow where we were, so therefore we have to challenge them.” Also, the steps being taken to reach a
final state of disbandment and standing down (the objective of the UVF as expressed to me by Tom Roberts, David Ervine, Henry McDonald, Chris Hudson and the UVF Command Staff) are proving problematic as they often resort back to violent tactics or are met with a variety of community and political objections and rejections.

The UVF truly believes that the campaign of violence by the IRA is over, the communities from which its members come from are safe for the moment, and the union with Britain is also secure. As a result, the organization is looking to stand down and move on. To what exactly is unclear. There have been successes in the political realm for people like David Ervine, Billy Hutchinson, Gusty Spence and the PUP, but they are now being challenged heavily in their political support by other Unionist political parties. Community groups like EPIC and the John McMichael Center are also providing outlets for former and current paramilitary members to have an influence within their communities but through the power of dialogue and persuasion rather than violence. However, these groups also face challenges of funding (political backing), consistent and continuous community support, and proper legal recognition (of things like political prisoner status) that would allow them to better assist their communities collectively and individually. There have also been set backs in the disbandment process through internal feuding, crime, disenfranchisement with politics and community, and announcements by the British and Irish governments which call the sanctity of Northern Ireland back into question for some (most generally this is talk of a “plan B” option should Stormont fail to reassemble). Still, in the end it seems that the UVF has taken significant strides towards
a complete abandonment of violence and continues to do so although admittedly with varying degrees of success and speed.

**Conclusion:**

How can I end this rather disjointed, complex, and somewhat controversial paper? Through my project and this paper, I have encouraged the reader and myself to reexamine violence and its effects. Instead of deploring violence, tossing it aside, and focusing on those subjects and tactics which are more morally appealing to me, I tried to see exactly how violence can impact those very non-violent, political and peaceful strategies I wish to spend time on and adopt. Whether I was successful in this endeavor is up to my readers; if they feel more informed on the UVF, the reasons for its violent methods, its transition to politics, and the motivations, successes and difficulties it encountered along the way, then I will consider this project quite useful if only in a broad and introductory sense. Certainly it has helped me to examine topics and organizations which I was unfamiliar with, and confront issues I may otherwise have passed over and made false assumptions about. If the readers of this project leave with a desire to more fully and critically examine the role of violence in society, politics and peace, I will be extremely happy. This paper is very much a beginning and not an end. Perhaps a conclusion which draws heavily on those even more committed to this exploration and analysis than myself would be helpful.

Chris Hudson said to me, and I think rightly so, “There are often more egos in the peace movement than in the paramilitaries of Northern Ireland.” To me, what this suggests is that a history of violence, coming out of the darkness so to say, allows one not
only to come in touch with what they truly believe and need, but often also with a new resolve to keep others firmly in the light. Such understanding may be hard, but not impossible, to reach without approaching the human limits (morally and physically) which violent action demands. Hudson also had a practical message for me to share and one which provided me a new resolve for addressing difficult topics such as violence.

“Peace work has to be symbolic and substantive. It must deal with what is actually going on, the reality of the situation, and how to make the violence stop; not just whether the violence should have taken place to begin with. People have to be realistic when it comes to peace work. This doesn’t mean that we can’t dream and be hopeful, but it does mean we have to be willing to accept that our dreams are not as close, and sometimes not as practical, as we may like them to be. I don’t want any utopian dreamers knocking on my door unless they are first willing to deal with the situation at hand. Resolving what is at hand is the only way we can ever hope to make the dreams anything more than dreams.”

Violence is a force which, rightly or wrongly, demands to be dealt with. It is the ultimate ultimatum. If we are to challenge it and defuse it, we must first recognize and know it. The consequences of not doing so are too numerous and detrimental for us to hide behind a shield of self-righteousness and simplicity in not addressing and examining, in a critical yet understanding manner, violence as a force. I sincerely believe there is hope in this endeavor as well. I will end with a quote from the CLMC Ceasefire Statement of 1994 found in the Truth Recovery document put out by ex-prisoners, Loyalists community members, researchers, and current paramilitary members which I hope will give the reader an idea of just what strides can be made in coming out of the darkness.

“In all sincerity, we offer to the loved ones of all innocent victims over the part 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 political circumstances to degenerate into bloody conflict. We are on the threshold of a new 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.”

Note: The preceding pages have been a very brief, somewhat scattered and incomplete summarization and analysis of my interviews and reading for this project. Even in the process of writing I came to realize that much of what I hoped to cover would have to be abandoned or significantly stunted for the sake of time and space. However, I would again highly recommend that any reader take the time to read the transcriptions of my interviews and daily observation journal as it will offer a much broader and more complete picture of the UVF, Loyalism, Unionism, violence, politics and peace. The information contained within those interviews is far more valuable to anyone wanting a snapshot of these topics than my analysis can every hope to be, especially in the time and space provided. I also believe they are helpful in challenging some of my claims, and gaining valuable counter arguments to much of what I, and others, have said.
Appendix A: Daily Observation Journal and Field Notes

April 18th, 2005:

-Made contact with Chris Hudson who was a leader of the Peace Train movement, the primary contact between the Irish government and loyalist paramilitaries, and a Unitarian reverend in Belfast. I had met him a few months ago at the Dublin Unitarian Church and he gave me his business card. Unfortunately, on my first trip to Belfast, I was far too busy to contact him. I felt awkward trying to remind him who I was and calling him out of the blue (if I had it to do again, I definitely would have contact him earlier). However, I was lucky and he was generous to agree to meet with me over the weekend. I suspect this willingness to be flexible and personable is what made him appealing to groups like the UVF and UDA who are known for being secretive and careful whom they speak with.

-Arrived in Belfast via bus from Dublin.

-I feel like I am returning to a somewhat familiar place. Within a few minutes, and without a map, I am able to locate where we are, how to reach the hostel, and how to get from there to our QUB accommodations.

-I do not feel home here. It feels almost like a test area, where I am an observer. I suspect this has much to do with my intentions in coming here (I am here to conduct a observation based research project). Still, I can’t help but wonder if maybe people who live here all their lives, or certainly those that move here, might also feel disconnected. I suspect that many who live in the interface areas (but also in more of the affluent regions) probably feel a sense of belonging and connection with their specific region, but a strong disconnect from the communities a short distance from them.

-Short physical distance, enormous ideological and socio-economic divides.

-Housing at QUB is interesting. We area living in what looks like an old house which has been converted to dormitory style housing. It is broken into sections, with each section having a similar layout, with three floors, each with kitchen, laundry and washroom facilities. Rooms are pretty spacious in comparison with my single room in Beloit (measuring about 12x9). There appear to be only a few other residents in the whole house, maybe 10-12 total plus the SIT students. Every one of the other residents I have met is a foreigner (primarily from Europe, but almost all continents are represented) either working for QUB or studying there. All of them are very outgoing and seem interested in meeting other foreign students, especially Americans. The house is located about 4 blocks out of the city from QUB’s main building, on Malone Road.

April 19th, 2006:
Walked to City Hall and took a tour of the building. It was an abbreviated tour has a major exhibit about the Titanic was taking up much of the building. I found it bizarre that most of the historical items on display were for sale. A few weeks before, the first draft of the Irish national anthem was sold to a private bidder. Why are items that seem to hold an enormous amount of significance for the entire country allowed to go up for sale to private bidders? In the USA, many items of such significance are held in museums and never come up for public auction. Is this the result of true free market economics (you can buy anything)?

I found it fascinating to see the variety of reactions of people on the tour as the guide made an effort to explain the politics of the city and its violent past. When sitting in the council chambers, we were told which party section we were sitting in. Two residents of Belfast acted with disgusted when they found they were sitting in the Sinn Fein section. When an American family found they were sitting in the DUP’s section, and our tour guide made special mention that Paisley was associated with that group, they looked at her blankly, obviously not understanding the significance. Later, I heard them asking question which betrayed the fact that they had little to no idea the Troubles had ever happened.

Politics are definitely divided at the municipal levels just as they are at the national level. The same parties, with the same general platforms are the major players. However, I did find it unique that the Lord Mayors of Belfast had included a wide range (especially in recent history) of people from Sinn Fein, the UUP, the DUP, and the Alliance Party.

The very structure of the building shouted its British influence, which certainly makes sense given the British commissioned it far before even the troubles of the early 1900s (it was designed by British architect in renaissance style which was highly popular for British administration buildings around the empire at that time). Still, I imagine members of Sinn Fein and the nationalist community would probably alter the emphasis given to Britain and the crown in many of the buildings statues and mosaics, should they ever gain power.

Took a taxi to the Shankill Road. This was the Tour de France of being an outsider. The taxi driver did not understand my accent at all, and had no idea what road I was talking about. I will need to try and get this right as it is a rather infamous area of the city, with the correct pronunciation being part of its identity. Then, I realized I had no idea what address I was going to. I gave him the name of a number of structures on the Shankill which I thought were obvious (the EPIC Center, Alternatives, the PUP office, the Aleese Center, etc) but was met with blank stares. I imagine this gentleman was not from the Shankill area himself, thus explaining why he was not familiar with the area. Finally, we agreed that he would just drop me on the lower Shankill. To say the least, he looked surprised at my request. I imagine he does not get many Americans (who he probably assumes are tourists) requesting to go to this area. I hope that as I establish
myself in this area, I begin to feel more comfortable in my activities there. I hope this confidence is noticed by residents of the area with the result being more open doors.

-Once on the street, things did not immediately improve. The first problem was that many of the centers and organizations I was hoping to visit were closed. I am not sure if this is still in recognition of the Easter holiday or simply the way these places operate. It was in the early afternoon, so if I return again and find them closed, I think I will try to make contact first by phone and see if maybe they are open by appointment or special occasion only. However, it was not just the centers that were closed. Many restaurants and stores appeared closed and shuttered as well. I wonder if this is an indicator of the economic difficulties this area is experiencing?

-Still, I was able to find the physical location of these sites and get their telephone numbers which will be helpful in establishing contact.

-I stood out like a sore thumb with my backpack on, pen in hand, writing down telephone numbers and standing outside closed buildings. This did not make a good first impression and I received some very strange looks. Especially given the society I am trying to gain access to, maybe simply meandering around is not the best idea, or could be done in a more casual and less conspicuous way. I do not blame them for being suspicious and guarded. Strange people have quite often meant trouble, especially in the past. If I were to do this again, I would have made some phone calls before hand and try to establish at least one organization that I was intending to visit while I was there.

-To try and “break the ice” I decided to stop in two stores. The first was a small sandwich shop and ice cream store. When I walked in, there was no one out front, but I could hear people in the background. I waited, and a man in his early 40s came out. He was built like a boxer, short with bulging arms that had tattoos all over them. I doubt this man had been just an ice cream server all his life. He looked at me suspiciously for a moment before he even asked what I wanted. I asked about one of his ice cream flavors, and then on his recommendation, ordered a cup. In this short exchange, his entire demeanor towards me shifted. By the end, he was telling me other places I could find good ice cream in the city, smiling, and telling me to come back any time. This was a good lesson in how even small gestures, and being polite can really break down barriers. I plan to return and try to develop this relationship if for no other reason that establishing myself as a figure in the community.

-The second store was a small news shop. I came in and asked the attendant and a customer if there was a local newspaper for sale. Bother were women in their late 30s to early 40s who obvious knew one another at least casually based on their conversation and demeanor towards one another. They pointed out a Shankill community paper and told me I
could take it for free and even take several if I knew other people who might be interested. I thanked them for their help and said I would stop back in again to get the next issue. I also took several copies for other people in the group. I hope this gave the women the impression that I was interested in the area. I will stop back again, and in addition to getting another copy of the local paper, I will buy something to give the store some patronage.

-I had never noticed the changing “territories” on the Shankill until I walked its entire length today. Lower Shankill appears to be largely UDA territory based on the murals and graffiti. Middle Shankill is very mixed, with UVF, LVF, and UDA represented. It is also the location of many of the community centers for the area, and the PUP’s office. Upper Shankill is UVF territory. This is also the location of the Orange Order Lodge, leisure center, and the DUP’s office. EPIC and Alternatives are located on this stretch of road. I wonder if loyalist feuding prevents some residents from accessing certain services because of their location and nature?

-The entire road is showing the signs of economic depravation. Graffiti and garbage are literally strewn everywhere, especially in any open space. There are many empty lots, and buildings which look as though they have not been open in many years. I was surprised to see many buildings with operating business occupying the first floor, and the upper floors being burned out shells. It doesn’t appear there are any major development projects going on, or any attempts to clean up this area.

-I was also struck by the lack of police presence. During the entire hour and a half I was on the Shankill, I did not see one police officer or cruiser. In contrast, I saw three police officers between the Shankill and city hall building. This might have something to do with a mural declaring the residential area off the Middle Shankill a PSNI “no go” area. If the police aren’t in control, who provides protection? Are the paramilitaries still acting as community police?

April 20th, 2006:

-I made my first contact today. I have a meeting with Tom Roberts at the EPIC Center for this coming Monday. Even the process of calling him and the short conversation we had taught me a few things.

-The numbers advertised on the outside of buildings and in some publications are often not the full number. Most will need you to add 028 and 90 to the front of them before you can successfully dial. This is because it is assumed that most people who would be calling these places are from the area and thus familiar with the need for these additions. However, for myself as an outsider, it was confusing. I wondered how this group made its contact information available to
organizations and individuals outside its community. I found several studies published by the group and sure enough, the full telephone number was there. I also noticed there are two different addresses for EPIC. Mr. Roberts explained that one in the community center in Shankill and the other is more the “public” and research base. I will try to visit both to see how they differ in presentation, work, and feel as I suspect the contrast will be telling.

-I was concerned that many of the organizations I was hoping to contact were open only during very select hours because of their being closed yesterday in the early afternoon. Mr. Roberts explained that many businesses were closed for the Easter holiday until the Thursday following it, and some were closed for the entire week. After this time, most are open during normal 9-5 hours.

-I was struck by how open Mr. Roberts was to meeting with me. I had only briefly explained who I was and what I was doing (which I do not think I even did a good job communicating) and he suggested that we meet. I suspect I am not the first person to make such a call to his organization. I wonder how the services and reception I receive from him differ from a community member who contacts EPIC (our reasons for contacting the center are probably quite different). How does EPIC divide time and resources between local and non-local sources?

-I went to the Linen Hall Library today as well. Earlier in my studies, I had wondered exactly what role academics could or should play in the conflict and its resolutions. My host father in Derry had said that academics did not understand the conflict as they were too far removed from the actors and situation. As a result, the solutions they offered were unrealistic and off base. However, I am finding academic sources very helpful in my investigation. If I am to make the best use of my time and those that I interview, I need to come in armed with a good knowledge of the organization and topic I am researching. I could not accomplish this without academic sources like the CAIN website and Linen Hall Library. The variety of sources and perspectives they consolidate into one location also allow people to begin “understanding” the other side without even meeting them. Although at some point this personal interaction will need to occur, it cannot hurt to come in prepared and armed with background knowledge just as in my situation. Given the Linen Library’s prominent location and extensive resource base, I am guessing that others also see the benefits of this organization (or at least the benefits of being seen to support it).

-Thinking on the question of academics being removed from the conflict made me wonder just how close politicians are in contrast. Certainly some, like many members of the PUP were directly involved in the conflict. However, I wonder just how close some MLAs in parties like the UUP and DUP ever were to the violence and side effects of sectarian combat. Besides, what exactly defines closeness? Certainly most of the current politicians lived during the time of the troubles, and likely lived in cities/areas that were affected in some way or another. Much of the literature I have read talks about the “street credibility” ex prisoners carry, especially with youth and their immediate community members because
they have done the time and been as close to the conflict as one can come. Certainly, most politicians lack this connection, but does that have an effect on the peace process and/or why people vote for the parties they do? Why are groups like the PUP losing support, or at least not gaining more, if they can put forward this sort of credible and trusted candidate?

April 21st, 2006:

- I traveled back to the Shankill Road today in an attempt to contact more organizations and individuals, as well as become more familiar with the area. It was a good trip if for no other reason than that most organization and businesses were open (in contrast with Wednesday). I was told that Easter vacations and closing usually lasted until at least the Wednesday after, but often for the entire week. I hope that as the holiday season moves on, I am able to gain more immediate access to those groups I wish to speak with.

- Alternatives is a center located at the very top of the Upper Shankill Road. It was established in conjunction with the Ex-Prisoner Interpretative Center (EPIC) as a restorative justice program which aimed to discontinue punishment beatings by paramilitary groups by offering alternatives to violence. Since then, it has branched out to offer a wide range of youth activities, many of which are directed and lead by ex-prisoners in an attempt to steer youth away from violence and towards community involvement. Alternatives continues to work closely with EPIC as well as a variety of Athletic and Cultural centers in Belfast to develop programs for youth in the area.

- Much of the building is covered in graffiti which was put up by local youth in an effort to give them an artist outlet that did not involve violence or vandalism.

- The building was not open, but I was unaware of that when I rang the bell. After a short time a women named Jennie answered the door. She was a victims’ support worker for Alternatives and was in the office preparing for next week, which is when the center actually reopens. However, she was happy to speak with us. She said that normally the project manager would have spoken with us as well, but he was currently talking with several youth from the community. The way she said it gave me the impression that something violent, or potentially violent, had occurred and that this was a delicate situation that could not be interrupted. I suspect Alternatives, given the community it service and the fast pace at which delicate and dangerous situations can develop, is seldom really closed. Just in the ten minutes I was there, two other people also arrived to speak with Jennie. Jennie seemed to agree, and said she was looking forward to an upcoming vacation when she would not be on call. Whoever works in such an environment must truly be devoted to the “cause” as I doubt the pay or benefits draw many in.
I am not sure how helpful Alternatives will be to my project specifically, but I was happy I made the visit. Jennie took down my contact information, who I was, and what I was studying and said she would circulate it around her contacts so that people knew who I was and what I was looking for. I am hoping this will help me break further into this apparently tight knit community.

My next stop was the DUP office on the Upper Shankill Road. This office is located directly next to the EPIC Center and immediately across from Alternatives. I could no help but feel this was slightly ironic in that a political party such as the DUP, who has used such fiery rhetoric to oppose prisoner release, paramilitary activity, and criminals in the community, located itself next to two center who deal directly with these individuals. The office was quite small, but had a well maintained façade and sign, which was in contrast with most other organizations and businesses in that area. Inside, it was also quite stylish. Leather sofas and arm chairs were available to waiting visitors in addition to a small kitchen area with tea and biscuits. The carpet looked and smelled new, as did the paint, and the smell of cigarette smoke was strangely absent. All these things confirmed my feeling that the DUP was, and purposely gave off the impression that it was a party of the working class (because of its location) but removed in some very important ways.

When I entered, a young (mid 20s) female worker was assisting a very old (at least late 70s) lady with a concern she wanted addressed by the MLA for the region, Diane Dodds. I could not quite figure out what the concern was, but both women seemed to agree it was something that Mrs. Dodds would need to address immediately. I was glad to see politics in the region were still at work even with Stormont not being in session. However, I noticed that the elderly women was also dressed quite nicely, and drove off in a Mercedes sedan (of which I have seen only a handful in the Shankill area). I wonder how representative she is of the Shankill Road district and its political opinions/needs. How far outside the Shankill and its immediate residential areas does the electoral district reach? Would a member of the more immediate community receive such a warm welcome and immediate assistance?

A young (early 20s) man named Mark came down from upstairs and asked if he could help me. Mark, as well as the other female employee were also dressed in designer clothes, and had a style about them that I could not find in other Shankill residents I passed on the street or met at other organizations. Again, I wondered if these two were from the area. However, I was interested to see such an apparent youth involvement with the DUP (which I had considered to be a party which attracted older parts of the population rather than younger). How close are the politics of Mark to Ian Paisley? Will this new generation of the DUP bring with it new policies and tactics?
Mark was very friendly and helpful, and seemed excited about my project, which I presented as unionist political activism and community dynamics in the Shankill area. Although Diane Dodds was still on vacation for Easter, he told me she would return next week, and he would do his best to get me in to see her right away. I wonder if constituents of Mrs. Dodds are able to gain such quick and easy access to her, or if they are, whether they choose to do so. Does the DUP, through its policies and rhetoric create a strong divide between members and the “others”?

I had lunch at a small café on the Middle Shankill. The owner said it was a family business, and that very few foreigners ever came in. I do not find that hard to believe. The only other obvious outsiders I have seen are on the tour buses, which occasionally pass through the area. I doubt those people ever get off in this area. I cannot help but think how limited the view they get of this area must be from the top of a tour bus. By the end of my lunch, the owner (an elderly women in her mid to late 60s) and her daughter (who was in her early to mid 30s) were both quite friendly to me. They said they hoped to see me again since I was going to be in the area. Even through these relatively minor experiences, I am feeling like I am making progress in being coming recognized and accepted by the Shankill community. Although my “outsider student” vibe can be awkward to handle at first, I imagine many people actually want to tell their stories, and give an account of their area in their words. People on the buses are not looking for this sort of close contact, so an outsider who is genuinely interested may be well received.

I then visited the PUP office on the Middle Shankill. It had been closed when I first walked by at 10:30AM that morning, but by noon it was open. I saw several people coming in and out, most of them being young (20s-30s) males. Inside, I met John who was a heavyset man who worked as a PUP community advisor and receptionist for Hugh Smyth, who is the PUP city councilor for that region. He gave off the impression that while he was quite open and generous with his time, you did not want to be on his bad side. I was also interested in how he was respectful of the young men coming in and out with various complaints, messages and errands, but also firms with a “take no guff” attitude. The office itself was quite casual, with a small lobby area, dominated by John’s desk and some waiting chairs. The whole place smelled strongly of cigarette smoke and looked as if it could us some general repair work (the stair case leading up to the second floor did not appear very stable and I worried John, should be god up, might do it in). However, I believe that this environment was one that John, the young men, and many other supporters of the PUP in the are would be use accustomed to, and likely made them feel they were in a familiar space.

John directed me to contact the East Belfast PUP office once he heard I was looking to do research work. I hope that by going through that more typically contact to the PUP, I may be able to return to the Shankill office and meet some of its politicians and supporters. John was very nice and called the East Belfast office, introduced me over the phone, gave me the address and directions, and
suggested I ask them particularly about the youth leadership programs that were currently being set up.

-I do wonder why the PUP does not have a stronger presence on the Shankill Road. Given that the upper part of the road, and the entire region, as traditionally been a source of strong UVF support, it seems that many of those supporters would vote for the PUP. I also believe that until fairly recently, Billy Hutchinson was a PUP MLA for this area. Why did they lose the seat? Is their political support stronger at a local rather than national level?

-On my way home, I stopped by the UUP office of Michael McGimpsey on Sandy Row to see if I could not also get an interview with that party. Again, the exterior and interior of the building looked significantly better maintained than those structures around it. I also thought its location, immediately adjacent to the John McMichael Center for ex-prisoners and community work with paramilitaries was ironic. In our meetings with Mark Neale of the UPP, he has said that the UUP was not in favor of working with criminals and undesirable individuals. It seems to me that a large section of the Sandy Row community is made of exactly this sort of individual, and those who do not fit these categories are more amicable towards them. How does the UUP gain its support in this region then? Is there more interaction between the party and organizations like the John McMichael Center then they let on?

-Inside, I found a young (late 20s) man and an older (mid to late 60s) gentleman conversing in a joking manner. Upon my arrival, they both were eager to help me. It made me question just how much work was getting done in this office. If the community was not coming to them, shouldn’t they be going to the community in an attempt to make themselves known and be able to better represent their constituents? Was the fact that they jumped at the opportunity to help me so quickly a sign that their office had little interaction on a daily basis with the community, or was it a sign that they were happy to see a new/foreign face (and what does that say about their community relations)?

-I informed them that I was looking at unionist political activism and the efforts of unionism to present a unifying and inclusive platform from the 1990s to the present. Both stared at me and I thought I had stumbled into some unknown taboo. Then, the older gentleman (whose name was Rob) asked jokingly if I had any suggestions for him because he had been trying to figure that out for years, along with the rest of the party. I have heard this sentiment expressed before and it makes me even more curious why Unionism has not made efforts to present a coherent front until relatively recently (and even then with questionable tactics and success). I am excited about returning for another meeting with Rob on this subject, and I hope he might give me some valuable insights into the political strategies of Unionism, and maybe the relationship they have with Loyalism and the paramilitaries.
April 23rd, 2006:

-I went to All Souls Non-Subscribing and Dissenting Presbyterian Church today. The church is located at the end of Elmwood Avenue, just down from the main gate of Queen’s University. The church was built in 1896 and is one of three congregations of this faith in Belfast. The building itself is modeled after the Scottish Anglican tradition, with a large central cathedral, two small wings connected to the cathedral running parallel to it, a bell tower about 30-40 feet high, and a memorial garden encircling the church. Chris Hudson is the minister for this church, and he is how I came to be aware of the church and was invited to attend services. There were about 35-40 people in attendance, with the vast majority of them being over the age of 60. The service lasted about an hour and fifteen minutes and included singing from the choir, readings by members of the congregation, a children’s story read by Mr. Hudson, and two short sermons by Mr. Hudson.

-Upon arrival, I was a little nervous. First, I was walking into a completely new environment on the invitation of a man I barely knew and was trying to get close to for the purpose of his connections and knowledge. Second, I was under the impression that this was a Unitarian Church, and from the sign outside, I was confused as to exactly what faith was represented here. I really did not know what to expect walking through the doors, and that made me a little uncomfortable. Luckily, upon entry my fears evaporated and I was really pleased I had the opportunity to experience this service and space.

-I was greeted by two elderly (mid 70s) gentlemen. They seemed a bit shocked to see a new face, and were particularly taken aback by my accent. Still, this generated a great showing of curiosity and hospitality on their part. As I was early, I had a cup of tea with them and they asked me about who I was, where I was from, how I had come to this service, and what my religious background was. They then gave me a tour of the church and explained to me what the faith of the congregation was about. It became clear this was a Protestant church which was acutely tied and devoted to the ideals of the Reformation and Martin Luther. Because it placed a great deal of emphasis on individual interpretations of, and relationships with spirituality, it did closely parallel the Unitarian Church. In fact, these two gentlemen explained that many members of the congregation also considered themselves Unitarians, and when they were in the States attended Unitarian services. Having talked with them, I began to really feel welcome and at home in this setting. It felt familiar, much like my church at college and the one I was raised in.

-The men said that the church prided itself on being progressive and accepting of all faiths, especially those within the Christian tradition. Its minister are known for being influential, well educated, highly motivated to effect change, and devoted to peace
and understanding. I could see, even through my limited interactions with him, why Chris Hudson was now the minister for this congregation. This progressive tradition was also seen in the history of the members. Many families had been attending this church for generations.

-Chris came and said hello to me just before the service started. He asked if it would be ok for him to introduce me and if I might say a few words. Wanting to be friendly and make a good impression, I of course said that would be fine. After his introduction (which was terribly kind and generous, especially given how little he knew about me) I said who I was and what I was doing in Belfast. I also said what congregation I was from in the states and said they were all very welcome to visit me there should they be in the area. I was giving a rousing round of applause afterwards and several members came and shook my hand as I was sitting down, which really made me feel welcomed and at home.

-Chris’ sermon was very interesting given his background. Chris was born and raised in the Republic of Ireland in a family which he described as, “nationalist bordering on republican,” in political ideology. He became interested in trade unions and labor organization and began working as a trade union organizer in the Republic. Given his cheerful and amicable personality, his quick smile, and motivation (according to those I spoke with in the congregation), he became well known and respected in working class communities. Soon, his work and connections took him to Northern Ireland. There, he began to meet Protestants in working class areas like Sandy Row and Shankill Road and earn their respect as well. Through these connections, several loyalist paramilitary groups knew him as a person from the Republic who could be trusted. Soon, it became clear that the loyalist paramilitaries and the Republic could gain from interaction and communication with one another. A trusted mediator and facilitator was needed, and quickly it was agreed that Chris would be a good candidate. He became the primary contact between the South and the loyalist paramilitaries. He also worked as an organizer and facilitator of the Peace Train movement, which gathered groups of people together to travel by travel back and forth from Dublin to Belfast to prove the connect and good will of North and South. Chris is credited by many academics, politicians and paramilitary members as being a key factor in the peace process.

-Chris’ sermons focused on the fact that today is St. George’s Day and the national day of England. He went on to describe how proud he was of his English nationality and was proud to declare that, although it would be unheard of for nationalist/republican to do so. The message was that one can be proud of their heritage, or at least connected with it, even without unequivocally supporting
what that heritage stood for. It was a sermon about understanding, acceptance, and intelligent questioning and development. I really thought he did a great job making his point by combining his personal history, humor, current events, mythology, and religion into a delivery mechanism which was easy to listen to, and promoted those who heard it to continue questioning themselves after they left.

-I could not help but think about how this sort of charisma and diplomacy were probably the reason for the trust a variety of groups and individuals put in Chris. He preached a message about identity which allowed and even encouraged the listener to embrace themselves and their identity, but to do so in the spirit of how immensely complex that identity is in each of us. Loyalist, who appear to have had difficulty vocalizing exactly what their identity is and allowing that identity to co-exist peacefully with others, likely found Chris’ ideology to be welcoming and helpful. I believe that republicans, while more in touch with what they perceive their identity to be, could do with taking a closer look at really makes up their identity, and how its complexities can make it more compatible with others.

-After the sermon, I drank more tea with the congregation and had several more tours by people who gave their own personal accounts of their involvement with the church and its history. I thought it was interesting to see Chris’ sermon already at work as these people embraced a wide variety of national backgrounds, religion practices, and political ideologies. I also met Chris’ wife Isabelle who was very kind to me and said that Chris had spoken about me quite a bit recently. She was striking and had an elegant aura about her, without appearing standoffish in the least bit. I had heard she and Chris worked together quite a bit, and I saw how the two of them could make quite an impression on almost anyone. Everyone I spoke with invited me to come back and wanted to help with my research project. I was struck by how similar this reaction was to that of my congregation back home when we meet foreign visitors. This friendly and welcoming atmosphere is one that seems to be lacking from many circles in Northern Ireland. Party policies like that of the DUP, UUP, UKUP, and to an extent Sinn Fein do not seem to work towards inclusion, but instead exclusivity. I wonder what gains could be made, and have been already, if this welcoming and accepting atmosphere was extended to loyalists and the paramilitaries.

-One gentleman I spoke with said he believe that this particular church and its members and let down the public a bit during the Troubles, certainly before the arrival of Chris, because they had not done more to stand up to people like Paisley who preached
exclusivity. He believes that people were so worried about coming under attack from Paisley and his followers, that they “stayed low” in an effort to avoid criticism being turned on them. But the very fact people were so willing to attack people preaching something outside what they were acclimated to may signal that policies of inclusion may not be successful on their own, or even appropriate in every specific situation. In the present, it seems like the philosophy of this church is a good one, and one that many people may be willing to examine and adopt, partially or entirely. However, this might not have been the case three decades ago.

-Another gentleman spoke with me about how he felt like the underlying social issues that caused the Troubles were shouldered out of the spotlight of public attention by the sectarian and nationalist issues of the Troubles. He believed that the real battles being fought were based around subjects such as the violent nature of mankind, socialism, working class rights, and the distribution of resources. Instead, people were glazing over these issues by seeing the conflict as sectarian, colonial, and in the “best” cases identity based. Just as Chris had said, identity is certainly the root of who we are and why we act as we do, but it must be closely examined which the labels of national/republican and unionist/loyalist do not accomplish.

-Chris came up to me afterwards, having personally spoken to almost every member of the congregation before they left, and thanked me for coming. He also informed me that he was looking forward to seeing me again, and would do all he could to help with my project. He promised to contact some people within loyalist paramilitaries about me speaking with them, and was also open to me interviewing him as well. I suspect this friendly and confident attitude is what made him so popular and accepted by a variety of sources, from paramilitary to government-based. Chris gives off the impression of someone who is friendly, confidential, and truly desires to accomplish those projects he undertakes.

-That evening, the entire group in Belfast went to Martyr’s Memorial Free Presbyterian Church, the church established by Dr. Ian Paisley and also the specific location he preaches at. It is in East Belfast on Ravenhill Road. The building is quite large, taking up about a city block on its own and being several stories tall. It is made of red brick, has two large box shaped sections with a smaller rectangular section connecting them, does not have a bell tower of any sort, and is surrounded by a parking lot. On the inside, there is a very large, vaulted cathedral area in the box section closest to Ravenhill Road. It has enough seating for at least 1,000 people or so, and some seats are located stories above the ground and pulpit. The pulpit itself is very large, with several terraced layers to it made of a light colored wood and red carpet. The very top is at least 20-25 feet off the ground and this top section is where the preaching occurs. The organ is located just to
the left of the pulpit on the ground level. On the left hand side of the pulpit is the union jack, and on the right hand side is the flag of Ulster. On the walls around the pulpit are several plaques commemorating those who gave their lives for Ulster and Great Britain at various times. The entryway is made largely of marble with several offices leading off of the main foyer area. After entering the revolving doors and passing through the foyer, you pass through another large set of wooden doors at which point you are in a small hallway which encompasses the main cathedral area. Here are bibles and hymn books which you can take before entering the cathedral. Outside lighting comes in not through stained glass, but a combination of patterns made up of frosted and etched glass.

-There were about 55-60 attending the evening service. Those individuals in attendance were all dressed up. Men wore suits with a tie, while women all wore skirts (of a length which went beyond their knee at least) and fancy hats of a variety of designs and types (they reminded me of Victorian dress hats which were worn by the middle and upper middle classes). This dress code was also applicable to children above the age of 5 or so. There were very few exceptions to this style of dress. As a result, our group stuck out quite a bit, mostly because the girls did not have hats on and they were the only females not to have their heads covered. Most of those in attendance were over the age of 55-60 with many people appearing to be well over 70. Most of the young attendees where married couples between the ages of 25-35 and some had children with them. However, I was struck by the fact that there were only about 3-4 children below the age of 18 present. Also, there were no other attendees of the “student age” outside of our group. The children were all below the age of 12 or so, and the closest adults in age were at least 25.

-The sermon itself was relatively uneventful and pretty typical of Protestant services I had experienced before. I noticed a large number of similarities between this service, and services in the southern Baptist tradition of the United States. The style of fire and brimstone preaching, with an almost larger than life minister, combined with a large amount of music (which even had a southern, almost African-American, vibe to it) was all very representative of that tradition. However, there were a few differences. First, it was clearly pointed out at many points that the gospel used by this church was the original King James version of the bible. They had a high level of distain for any other versions, claiming they were trying to pervert the word of God. Second, the sermon, and in fact all parts of the service were very long. The whole thing took well over an hour and fifteen minutes. Third, I was a bit confused as to the content of Dr. Paisley’s sermon. It seemed to be one more appropriate for Good Friday as it focused solely and completely on Jesus dieing for the sins of man, and his time on the cross. Forth, Dr. Paisley did not let me down on the expectation I had of his preaching style. He is a large man, at least six feet three inches tall and very broad in the shoulders. Especially given his age (80 years old) I was taken aback by his sheer physical presence.
However, he was starting to show the signs of aging as his hair was pure white, his skin was very wrinkled and sagging, and he also had a rather developed slump to his shoulders. One thing that did not seem to be suffering the effects of old age was his voice which was booming and able to carry like few others I have ever heard. He had a microphone during the service, but I believe he could have done just fine without it. At times he would raise his voice to such a level that it actually caused me to sit up and back in my seat because of its sheer force. I can see how people are attracted to the simple physical nature of Dr. Paisley as he had an effect on me in just the short time I experienced him.

-After the service, we were approached by a number of young adults in the congregation. They welcomed us, asked where we were from, and what we were doing in Belfast. Then a gentleman named Gary, who I assume has a working relationship with the church given his knowledge about it, access to all its areas, and access to Dr. Paisley asked if we would like to see Dr. Paisley himself. Of course we said we would, so we were then lead back into a small room behind the pulpit. The room was covered in Ulster banners, photos of famous scenes in British and Ulster history, and pictures of British and Ulster politicians and Protestant ministers. However, the dominant aspect of the room was the large number of pictures and portraits of Dr. Paisley. At first I found this a rather conceded move, but as I thought about why Paisley would have chosen this style of “decoration” I think I came to a better understanding. Dr. Paisley is a cornerstone of this congregation. He founded it, and he himself is very much part of its history and appeal to many members. Throughout the evening, many members talked about Paisley in an almost mythical way, and everyone was of the opinion that he was a great man and individual. I suspect many of the portraits were actually gifts to him by enthusiastic followers and were hung in this room as a sign of appreciation as well as a move to enshrine the importance of Dr. Paisley.

-When Dr. Paisley came in, I was even more struck by his sheer physical size. He is larger than I am, in height and weight, and must have been even larger when he was younger. He was very kind to us, shaking each of our hands and chatting with us about the US and our studies here in Ireland. One thing he said really stood out for me; “I have been a leader of the opposition all my life. I was a leader of the opposition in the Protestant faith; I was a leader of the opposition before Stormont was first disbanded. I was a leader of the opposition during direct rule. I was a leader of the opposition during the restart of Stormont and I have been in the opposition during its second suspension. Now, as it looks to restart, I will again assume the position of a leader of the opposition of a shadow assembly and a power sharing executive which acknowledges and encourages criminals and terrorists!”
thought Dr. Paisley was forgetting something in this speech. He and the DUP were now the largest party in Northern Ireland. Being an opposition party when you are also the majority makes very little sense. I wonder if Paisley and the DUP have become so entrenched in their ways and ideology of being in the opposition, that they are struggling to find a platform on which to stand that is based on something outside being the opposition?

-The whole meeting was no more than a few minutes, but I was still very glad to have actually met the man I had heard so much about. Face to face, and speaking with him, I had conflicting feelings. I had heard from many people that in a personal setting, and especially those that did not directly involve politics or religion, Dr. Paisley was a very charismatic and charming person. I certainly got that feeling when I met him, and I could understand how he received the support he did. However, I could not escape the fact that I knew this was the man who had preached hate for decades and lead opposition to initiatives and processes which may have saved the lives of hundreds of people. How do those who follow him so ardently look past these facts? Is his personal character so strong that they are able to look by the negative aspects or give them an unwarranted positive skew? Or do we, as the outsiders and those who do not know them man all that well, have it wrong? Maybe, Dr. Paisley is simply very misunderstood by many people, especially those outside Northern Ireland and his influential circles. I doubt this, but it is still a possibility.

-After meeting with Dr. Paisley, we were given a tour of the church. I was struck how, from the outside the building looks quite big, but it is actually much larger than one would expect when you enter into it. The entire “second” building, which is attached to the church itself, is filled with smaller cathedrals, classrooms, and meeting rooms, all of which are rather substantial in size (the smallest we saw was about 35 feet by 40 feet). The whole building was remarkably clean and very well decorated. I wonder how much it cost to build this facility and where the money came from?

-During this time, we met Mrs. Paisley. She is actually an American from South Carolina and seemed happy to meet other Americans. When she found out we were all in school, she said she had a daughter going to Bob Jones University in South Carolina. Bob Jones is an evangelical Christian school which is one of the only unaccredited universities which operates in the US. It is nationally known for its intolerance of many people, especially homosexuals, and questionable policies in regards to women
and ethnic minorities as well. What does the daughter of the Paisley’s attendance at this school, and Dr. Paisley’s known connection with it, say about the ideology of the Free Presbyterian Church, its members and leaders?

-Our time at the Martyr’s Memorial Church ended with us listening to a short after service speech by Dr. Paisley and having tea with many members of the congregation. Paisley was far more relaxed during his short speech, and even spent the last few minutes telling jokes (which were rather entertaining). Just before he departed, he said that all the members should come and welcome the students who were visiting from America. I suspect this was simply a suggestion on his part, but it seemed to carry quite a bit of weight with it. Suddenly everyone in the room flocked around us to say hello and ask polite questions about who we were and why we were there. I overheard some members saying, “Well, now we have to talk to them!” after Paisley made the suggestion. Why was this? What had changed, and why did Paisley’s suggestion imply that it was actually an order?

-We did meet Christopher Stalford, a DUP city councilor for Belfast. He was very friendly and offered to take us on a tour of city hall the next day. He also said he would be happy to give me an interview, and even show me around his constituency. Mr. Stalford was quite young (no older than his mid 30s) and I was interested to see the “younger face” of the DUP. I also wonder if all DUP politicians are also members of the Free Presbyterian Church? If this is the case, it raises some concerns about the separation of church and state in my mind. The conflict in Northern Ireland in my mind is only slightly connected to religion because of its ties to identity, but if in the development of Northern Ireland politics precautions are not taken to keep church and state separate, it could quickly morph into a religious dilemma as well.

April 24th, 2006:

-While on the Shankill today, I stopped into a chocolate and sweets shop I was told to visit by another student’s advisor. The reason for the visit was that many considered the women who worked in the shop to be the “gate keepers” to the Shankill area, or at least the lower and middle portions. The shop was small (about 25 feet by 10 feet) and there were two women, one middle aged (late 40s) and other elderly one (mid to late 60s) working when we (Katie and I) arrived. The store was packed, ceiling to floor, with an enormous range of candies and chocolate from around the world. There was barely room to walk about. It was the first time anyone on the Shankill had directly asked me about my accent outside the organizations I ha approached about my project. Both women were interested why we were there, what we were studying and where we were from. They seemed genuinely interested in us and when they said we were welcome, I truly felt
like I was. Whether or not these women truly do have a network within the community which us informally “check in” with was expected or not, I was glad to have made myself more visible and explain myself a bit. I feel that on the visibility front, I have been very successful, but many times I do not explain who I am and why I am there, which is understandably inhibiting my ability to be accepted

-During my cab ride back from the Shankill, I spoke with my driver who declared that he was a Catholic Nationalist. He asked if I was vacationing and I replied that I was actually studying. He nodded, and replied, “Trying to see what makes Northern Ireland tick other than bombs?” When I told him that I was researching loyalism and unionism in an attempt to decipher the variety of opinions and tactics with in those groups, he replied, “Let me know if you every figure it out because it has always been a mystery to me!” I thought this was a good example of how loyalists and unionists have struggled to convey a message which is easy to understand and adopt by a variety of people, and also able to remain relatively constant through changing political and cultural climates.

-The cab driver went on to say that the ones who confused him most were the DUP and Ian Paisley. To him Paisley was living proof that, “certain leopards not only can change their spots, but they become more successful by doing so.” This was a not a positive statement, as it was made in reference to Paisley’s support, through word and deed, of inflammatory and even violent action on the part of unionists, and then his refusal to work with any group that had paramilitary ties. However, he reiterated what I had heard from a variety of people in that Paisley as a person was different than Paisley the preacher or politician. Why this separation between individual and ideologies/practice? The cab driver was of the opinion that once Paisley passed away, not only would the DUP adopt a less hard line stance, but that they would also lose community support. Where will this community support go however? It seems unlikely a DUP voter would vote for any nationalist party, and their support falling behind the PUP seems unlikely as well. The UUP is the most likely candidate it seems, so what do they plan to do with this support? With their unwillingness to interact with the PUP, I worry the consequence will be the UUP adopting a more exclusive stance towards other unionist parties in an attempt to consolidate power within the unionist community, while adopting more liberal policies towards nationalist and republican groups to prove they are capable of moving forward where the DUP was or is not able.

-My driver also suggested that the unionist community was fearful of the nationalist community because the tables, in terms of population percentage, would soon be turned. I am not certain this will happen as quickly as my driver predicted, but signs do seem to point to a population trend which supports the theory. “Soon, the unionist are going to be asking for exactly what the nationalists were, and won’t that be a pickle they are in!” He went on to describe how nationalists had not taken their
minority status sitting down, and the whole time, through a variety of channels (violence, politics, education, etc) were preparing themselves for when the tables did turn. According to him, now that the day was fast approaching, unionists were becoming increasingly worried what this meant for their future in Northern Ireland. This contradicted what Mr. Roberts had said to me earlier, in that loyalists for the most part believed the union to be safe, but supported his point that the nationalist community was one that unionist should, and in fact had to work with. He went on to explain how not only were the population proportions changing, but so were the socio-economic situations, especially in housing (nationalists now out “bidding” unionists). What I worry about is how the nationalists handle their newfound majority status when it does arrive. If they pursue a united Ireland, or react in any sort or revenge based manner, it seems they will encounter a large minority (a position they themselves have occupied for some time) which simply will not accept this, and has shown it is willing to fight and die for the cause. If more interaction on the grounds of promoting conflict transformation and creating a shared sense of future identity is not undertaken, I worry the result could be a return the political and violent conflict of the Troubles. This fear is made worse by the fact that those unionist/loyalist groups willing to engage in such conversation (EPIC and the PUP for example) are marginalized by the communities and parties which represent the majority of unionist voters.

-I wonder if parties such as the PUP could ever reach out to nationalists such as my cab driver and gain their political support. If the PUP is still determined to maintain the union with Britain, and it represents the most progressive and “liberal” wing of unionist thought on how this should be done, I worry the dilemma is that nationalists are equally unwilling to give up their desire for a united Ireland. If this is true, it lands the whole situation right back where it all started, in two political ideas that are simply incompatible with one another and neither side satisfied until its plan has “won”. Unless one side can sell their plan to the other, I see no way to actually diffuse the situation, and given that the currently political environment represents how unwilling these groups are to even interact with one another, let alone adopt each other’s ideas, the hope of this happening is slim at best.

-I was also troubled by what my driver said, since it seemed to echo sentiments I had heard from other nationalists and republicans, and also read in several sources. The general feeling espoused by these groups is that their victory is immanent, and as such unionist/loyalists should be prepared for the change. But I think they underestimate the strength with which unionists of all backgrounds are opposed to a united Ireland. Technical victory for nationalism may indeed be the outlook for the future, but what sort of “victory” this is I think can be debated. At what cost are nationalists willing to achieve a united Ireland, if their other requests (such
as an end to discrimination and a representative voice in politics) can be met without a return to violent conflict?

-Christopher Stalford, a DUP city councilor I met at the Martyr’s Memorial Church on Sunday, gave me a tour of Belfast City Hall today. During the tour, he introduced me to the Lord Mayor of Belfast (also a DUP member) the Deputy Lord Mayor as well as a SDLP councilor. I was struck by how light hearted these four individuals were when I was meeting with them, given their rather differing political views and the fact that just before, Mr. Stalford had not seemed to enthused about nationalist political attitudes. I was also struck by his admission that the political environment of Belfast was very close between unionists and nationalists. He referred to “how things use to be” with a tone and manner which I could not decided signaled his wish that those times would return, or that it presented an enormous challenge to the DUP which it would soon have to face.

April 25th, 2006:

-Today as I was waiting to meet Chris Hudson in front of QUB, I was struck by how much of a “university town” Belfast, at least in this region, really is. I felt very much like I was back in Madison, Wisconsin where university students make up almost 40% of the town’s population. This feeling was in contrast to my time on the Shankill, where I was struck by the lack of schools in the area, children in school, and sensed that much of what I had read about the lack of adequate education facilities for these communities and the limited use of those establishments which did exists was true. I wonder if there exist any scholarship programs that try and interest children from disadvantaged areas around Northern Ireland in education by taking away the cost barriers of those institutions? I also wonder if involving ex-prisoners and paramilitary members in the education process (as advisors, teachers, or mentors) would work to encourage kids to steer in other directions than violence and criminal activity?

-During my taxi ride out to Stormont, I had another very interesting conversation with a cab driver. This seems to be a come thing that many other SIT students are experiencing as well. I think a great ISP topic could be cab drivers in Belfast and any aspect of their lives.

-This gentleman was a man in his late 30s or early 40s who had grown up and lived all his life in Belfast. He was from a Catholic family and considered himself a nationalist who supported the SDLP. However, he said the majority of his friend in the cab company where Protestants who voted for either the UUP or DUP. More interesting though, was the fact that in elections for his district MLA (he is from East Belfast) he always voted PUP as his second choice behind the SDLP. He was a strong supporter of the idea that more center leaning nationalists were missing out on gaining support from the unionist community by not giving more direct support to those unionist groups that promoted progressive ideas. O David Ervine he said, “I don’t know what Mr. Ervine was doing in prison, but at some point he must have eaten a couple of dictionaries, ’cause I barely understand much of what he is saying. That man has more complicated and sophisticated
political ideas than many teachers or professors I know! Still, I have enormous respect for the man, more so than many SDLP candidates. Any time the peace process looked like it could unravel, or when Northern Ireland had its back to the wall, Mr. Ervine was always the first to put himself in harms way to save it. I mean shit, how many politicians do you know who are repeatedly willing to attempt political suicide for the better of their constituents and even those that hate them? In my mind, that means this man is genuine in what he does, and that’s what we need.”

-My cab driver also said he believed the sectarian politics and constitutional issues of Northern Ireland were causing other important political issues to be ignored or inadequately addressed. He was particularly flustered about education for his children and issues regarding taxing. “All we ever hear about are what the parties say about the peace process and devolution. What I want to see is less talk and more action. Let’s get our government back in the hands of people in Northern Ireland, address the issues that are effecting us all regardless of what party we vote for, and that whole time we can keep slowly working on the sectarian issues ’cause that is the only way anything is ever really going to be taken care of.”

-He also agreed that many people voted for Sinn Fein and the DUP out of fear. “They (Sinn Fein and the DUP) come in and scare people by saying, ‘If you for them, this will happen,’ or, ’If you don’t vote for us, this will happen,’ when it reality it is all a load of crap and they know it. But that is the only way they can keep people voting for them is to scare them. Well, I don’t buy it and that’s why I support the SDLP and PUP.”

April 27th, 2006:

-I attended the launch of a new book entitled The Orange Order: A Tradition Betrayed by Reverend Brian Kennaway. We (SIT) had met Rev. Kennaway before during our meeting with members of the Orange Order at Dan Winter’s cottage. During that meeting, most people were very turned off by the Orange Order, its members, and what they had to say. Although I do not agree with many of the sentiments and opinions held by the Orange Order, I was not as offended as some people in our group. As a result, I was glad to have another opportunity to examine the Order and its members.

-The launch was being held in the Library of Union Theological College, which is located immediately behind the main building for QUB’s library. The building was quite impressive, resembling in some aspects a toned down and smaller version of Stormont. It has a large, slightly recessed entryway with large white pillars on either side of the door. Once in, there is a grand staircase that branches of in opposite directions about halfway up its length. The library itself was a large room (about 100 feet by 75 feet) with a vaulted ceiling and was filled with a collection of seemingly very old books (based on their appearance) which were
primarily on religion and theology. The center of this room had been cleared and at one end, a podium with copies of the book for sale and a microphone were placed. In the middle of the room were several display cases with various pieces of Orange Order (OO) memorabilia, commemorative material, banners, books, and controversial cartoons/posters.

-At its peak (shortly before David Trimble and Brian Kennaway spoke) there were probably about 80-90 people in attendance. Most were well over 60 years old, and I saw maybe a handful of individuals below the age of 25. There were also only about 6-8 women I saw in attendance. Almost everyone was dressed up in a suit and tie or dress and I noticed very few wearing the color orange or any other item that may have distinguished them as Orange men. I recognized a few people, including Mark Neale and the other Orange man we had met at Dan Winter’s, as well as Roy Garland of the UUP who I was to speak with the next day. Chris Hudson and his wife Isabella were also in attendance. I thought I recognized other famous political figures at the launch, but simply could not place my finger on who they were.

-David Trimble was the first to speak. He emphasized that this book spoke, “the simply but correct truth about the Orange Order and its recent history.” He suggested that the book singled a need for the OO, especially its senior leadership, to take a careful look at what their institution stood for, and how it represented those views. He also was critical of the fact that the book pointed to members within the OO using their position within the organization to sabotage peace efforts and misrepresent information and happenings on a variety of subjects. In the end, Mr. Trimble (who is a member of the OO) said the OO was a proud and respectable organization, but that it was going through a period of crisis. How it handled itself over the next few years, he predicted, would determine how the Order was perceived locally and internationally, as well as what the organization stood for and supported for generations to come. “Such responsibility,” he cautioned, “is not something to be taken lightly. This book is a wonderful opportunity for the Orange Order to reflect long and hard about the principles and practices which it stands for.”

-Mr. Trimble’s speech was met with much applause and seemed very well received by those assembled. I thought that Mr. Trimble’s speech, the book, and the dilemma the OO is face are very representative of the trials and tribulations many groups and individuals are being forced to confront throughout Northern Ireland. As a society, culture, region and country in change, NI is filled with people trying to reassess and acclimate to the ever-changing space in which they live. Without a doubt, this must be a difficult task, and much of the conflict, trouble, and disagreement we see is likely a result of that difficulty. Open conflict is seldom simple or straight forward, but I believe that often times the period following the cease of open conflict can be far more complex and diverse not only in tactics and politics, but those who are getting involved and why.
Rev. Kennaway spoke next. Primarily, his speech focused on thanking the numerous people who had helped him write the book. However, he did make clear that, “This book is not one which condemns the Orange Order. In fact, it is one that I hope champions and illuminates the honorable traditions and values this organization was founded on. However, in that spirit, it does point to recent troubles and difficulties the Order has come across, which have resulted, in my opinion, with the leadership and certain members losing sight of those ideals. This is a book meant to promote dialogue and reflection in an organization which I am proud to call myself a member, and I hope to continue to do so.” He went on to say something else I found very interesting, “The Orange Order must decide if it is an institution based on faith with a political element, or a political institution with an element of faith. I believe the Orange Order to be an organization based on faith, not one based on a particular culture.”

The way I had always had the Orange Order explained to me was that it was an organization centered around the preservation of a lifestyle and culture. Here was a member of the OO calling for it to return strictly to its faith-based roots. It has always seemed to me that the OO and its activities are more about supporting and asserting a culture and tradition, rather than a religion. Would a return to faith be beneficial for the OO in terms of its position in the conflict? How would it retain its membership, since many consider it a cultural protector and icon? Regardless, I think the OO and its struggles are a perfect example of how it can be hard to maintain institutions within the ideologies with which they were established given the changing and complex nature of history.

Katie and I went out for dinner and a drink after the book launch and come across Northern Ireland’s imitation of American culture. We ate at a restaurant called Tony Roma’s which was styled after an American BBQ rib establishment. They were playing old American sit-coms on the television, playing swing music, and had pictures of American pop icons all around the walls. The palace was filled, and very busy the whole time we were eating. I wonder what the draw of such an establishment is? The food was not bad, but it certainly could not have been the reason for Tony Roma’s popularity. Belfast to me seems like a city with enough of its own history and culture, along with a variety of ethnic flavors, that it should not be so enamored with American pop culture. Maybe I am biased however, having grown up in that environment all my life. Still, it is strange to be an American abroad, but never really escape my home culture and country.

April 28th, 2006:

During my interview with the UUP at its Sandy Row office, I was struck by something that I had actually noticed at all the political offices I visited in Belfast. They really do appear to be open environments, which are very accessible to the public. People appear to
drop in on a fairly regular basis, without any appointment and often to bring up very personal or small matters like blocked drainage ditches and noisy neighbors. At every office I have visited, at least one person has come in while I was there, and numerous phone calls have come through. In my limited experience with political offices in the US, this is not how it works. Meetings are all by appointment, which usually take weeks if not months to schedule, and are certainly not about issues like noisy neighbors. It is very interesting to see how democracy and representative government work in a situation where there is a more equal representative to constituent ratio. I imagine this situation is also assisted by Stormont being suspended, allowing representatives to spend more time with their constituents. However, I wonder what this is teaching them about “small” politics and their importance to people opposed to “large” issues like the constitutional status of Northern Ireland? Also, I wonder if there are any clashes between city councilors and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) treading on one another’s political “territory”? What will happen to this availability when Stormont reactivates?

-I attended a meeting this evening at All Souls Church in Belfast. Henry McDonald was reading excerpts of his latest book Colours which is about his experience growing up in Belfast and how his political and social ideologies have changed and why. Mr. McDonald is a well known author and journalist on the conflict in Northern Ireland and security issues around the world. Mr. McDonald was a personal friend of Chris Hudson and they had worked together with loyalist paramilitaries before. The meeting was attended by about 25-30 people, all of whom were over 55 years old. I was the only student and person below that age present. Afterwards there was wine and crackers served, and the vast majority of those present stayed to chat and continue discussing what had been said.

-Chris obviously has a very high opinion of Henry. Henry approached him for an interview about his work with loyalist paramilitaries when times were particularly tense and difficult. Chris said he was hesitant, but heard good things about Henry and decided to risk it. In his words, “Henry handled interviewing me impeccably.” They have been friends ever since and have done quite a bit of work together in various fields.

-Henry had some great quotes, both from his book and during the question and answer session that followed.

-“Belfast is the last city in Europe that carries the dubious distinction of being walled, and not in a historical sense.”

-“The nationalist/republican community have only seen one side, the negative one, of what being British means.”

-“Truth and personal liberties are the corner stones of successful society.”

-“My Uncle John once said, ‘Imagine if kids see that (a peace wall). It would be seared in their wee minds forever.’”
There is a draw and allure of sectarianism, especially for youth, because of the desire to be part of the ‘in’ crowd, or just a member of a group. In Northern Ireland, this draw is added to by the excitement of the potential danger that comes along with sectarian feuding.

Northern Ireland has been the stage for personal tragedy colliding with momentous world events.

Being able to meet the man who I had read so extensively in preparing for my ISP, hear his background and its effects on him, listen to stories from his career, and speak with him personally added a new dimension to what I had read. I suppose this is the case with most such situations, and one of the great values on field study based learning. By making the connection personal, and examining things in context of the larger situation, person, community, region, etc you come to a new and more knowledgeable understanding.

Henry was born and raised in Belfast. He was from a Catholic family which had a nationalist tradition to its politics. He was a Marxist-Leninist for some time in his late teens, but eventually swore off that political ideology along with his Catholic faith. He was a member of a punk rock band for some years in his yearly adulthood before turning towards journalism. He has been a broadcaster for the BBC as well as a writer for several major newspapers in Ireland, England, and the world over at one time or another. Currently, he is the Irish editor of the Observer. He is also widely published as an author on Northern Ireland and especially the loyalist paramilitaries.

The reaction of the audience to Henry was mixed, but overall very positive.

Two Catholic women who had grown up in Northern Ireland and had both experience personal trauma and suffering during the Troubles were very indignant at his estimation of unionist political strategies, and especially the credit he gave David Trimble for his role in the peace process. They believed Henry was too critical of the nationalist side, and did not demand enough of the same criticism of the unionist side. They were especially angered when he suggested that there were many good things about being British. I wonder how representative these women were of the nationalist community. To me, it seems that both nationalists and unionists have a difficult time articulating and communicating their positions and identities, especially to the other side, in a way which makes
sense and can be respected. These women were not open at all to Henry and Chris’ suggestions that self examination and criticism of nationalism (or unionism such as the work of Rev. Kennaway in his book) from within was not only health for ensuring the movement stayed in touch with what was important to its members, but also in showing the other side that they could be worked with and were flexible. I suspect you would find similar sentiments on both sides in unionism, but which ones are dominate and prevailing?

-Another couple spoke up to say that as working class Protestants they had never really felt represented by any political party in Northern Ireland. This put them in a frustrating and difficult position, as it left them no one to vote for, and even when parties like the Alliance Party came close to their values, their power was overshadowed by the sectarian divides written into the government structure. I would have liked to ask them why they did not vote for the PUP? I imagine it had to do with the fact that they are either not unionists in the sense of wanted to preserve the union, or that they did not agree with the PUP’s ties to the paramilitaries, or both. If it is the latter, I think it is representative of a large pool of potential voters which are almost within reach of the PUP, but held at bay because of the paramilitary issue. How can they erase this unease and gain those working class Protestant votes with their socialist and democratic policies?

-I spoke with another elderly (late 70s) gentleman named Harry. Harry was from Portadown, had grown up there, and raised his own family there as well. He was a strong proponent of integrated education, having sent his youngest child to an integrated school. In his opinion, this was the best way to end the sectarian mindset that plagued many in NI. To him, the rest of the family had become integrated through his daughter’s experience and friendships. I thought this was in a way a solution to David Ervine’s question, “Why do people hate people they do not know?” The question still stands, but through education people get to know the “other” of their society and nullify the hate which accompanies the unknown in many situations. However, I wonder if this in and of itself is a complete solution. One of the Shoukris brothers (notorious criminals within the UDA who are currently under pressure from within the organization to stand down) attended integrated school and obviously is still filled with hatred. But maybe his hatred is more indiscriminate than that which typically accompanies the Troubles of NI.
According to Harry, paramilitary organizations were now nothing more than organized crime syndicates. “Any political ideology they might have had is gone now. The people who are involved have become accustomed to a criminal lifestyle and the financial benefits of being a godfather. They don’t want to lose that, so they hide crime behind a political veneer.”

April 29th, 2006:

-I paid a visit to the Sandy Row Loyal Orange Lodge (LOL) today on the invitation of Mr. Christopher Stalford, a DUP city councilor I had met at the Martyr’s Memorial Free Presbyterian Church. Mr. Stalford is a member of the LOL and often uses the space as an office for meeting with his constituents in the area, of whom many are also members of the LOL. The building is located on Sandy Row, close to where it connects with Lisburn Road. It is a large, three story red brick building, which was then in the process of having a new roof put on it. Inside, I was greeted by a Belgium brass band which was using a meeting room to practice for an upcoming brass band contest. Chris was in a meeting room which was adorned with pictures of LOL members and historic moments in Ulster’s history like Carson in 1912 and the Battle of the Somme in 1916. In the corners were the infamous orange collarets and bowlers caps. Another member of the LOL was counting and organizing a large pile of coins on one end of a rectangular oak boardroom table. I was never formally introduced to this man, but he was obviously a fixture of the LOL, being in his late 60s and proud of his membership since boyhood. I also had the impression that he was a leader within this LOL because of the way in which Chris interacted with him and how involved he was with a number of the activities the Lodge was engaged in. He gave me a tour of the LOL and a history of the OO in general, as well as a slightly questionable history of the USA. During the tour, I was struck not only by what he was saying, but the Lodge itself. It really did feel very much like a fraternity back at my home institution in Beloit. There were men, mostly in their 40s and 50s, hanging about a small bar area which was located within the Lodge, and well as working on a variety of repair projects. There were lounge-like spaces, clearly designed so that men could gather, be social, and play games like snooker and darts. I was also shown a number of the Lodge’s banners, all of which were based on historical achievement by OO members, or biblical passages. I saw no controversial banners related to the Troubles in Northern Ireland. What I did not see was any area directly related to religious worship. I wonder if Brian Kennaway, and his claim that the OO is and should be a religiously centered organization is not a bit out of touch with what these Lodges have become.

-This gentleman was very keen on impressing on me that history was not always as simple as it was made out to be.

-“The Orange Order has been a target of the Republican terror campaign, especially since the early 1990s. Yet we are made out to be the oppressors and bad guys because of our parades.”
“The USA has an enormous number of connections to Ulster. The American Revolution was a continuation of the Williamite Revolution. Eleven of the USA’s presidents were of Ulster Scotch background.”

-It seemed this man had a hard time associating the American Revolution with the OO, as the American Revolution was all about throwing out the very grown, and destroying the very union that the OO is so faithful to. “The crown and the Queen are good figure heads…good symbols of the British people. They shouldn’t be in charge, but they aren’t so I don’t understand what the problem is. A constitutional monarchy is a fine political system in my eyes.”

-“King William never rode a white horse. The paintings of him on a white horse were done because it was a symbol of the royal family at that time.”

-“The drums that the Orange Order are so well known for were actually Roman Catholic instruments. In fact, they were used by King William’s own personal bodyguards, The Royal Dutchmen, who were all Roman Catholics themselves. Now, right here on Sandy Row, there is the largest maker of drums which are used by Roman Catholics and the Orange Order alike.”

-“People always want to point to any anti-Catholic aspect of the history of the Orange Order, but they never give credit to those positive interactions which did, and still do, take place.”

-I am not certain how true what he said was, but I do feel that he truly and honestly believed it. The conviction with which he spoke was apparent, and he seemed determined to show another side of the story to an outsider.

-This same man also made other statements which I believe are worth quoting. They need no explanations, but I believe add to the context of my time at the LOL, and the basis of some of the opinions I found there.

-“Nobody is going to make me be friends with anybody, and that is exactly what the Good Friday Agreement is trying to do. I have Roman Catholic friends of my own who I respect and like quite a bit. But no one is going to force me to be friends with anyone else outside my wishes to do so.”

-“The amount of money the government throws at things like the paramilitaries is disgraceful. This whole welfare state mentality detracts from the work ethic which people in Ulster have always been known for and proud of. That money should be spent
attracting business and getting people the opportunity to work for a living.”

-“Belfast used to be a city which ran itself through business and industry. The government kept its hands off and everything was better off for it. Now, the government is taxing everything and there is nothing to show for it. The businesses always reinvested in the community. Now the government is ruining everything they get their hands on.”

-“The most important majority is the majority of one.”

-“I think the United States will break up in the near future. With all the Mexicans in the country now I think it is inevitable. All those wetbacks will change the whole country.”

-“Reverend Kennaway is not a popular guy within the Order at the moment. In fact, he is in a lot of trouble because of that book he wrote.”

May 5th, 2006:

-Today I had the opportunity to witness a parade commemorating the 90th anniversary of the UVF’s involvement in the Battle of the Somme in World War One. I discovered that the event was happening in an advertisement in the UVF connected magazine Combat which I received on the Shankill Road a few days earlier.

-The parade started from four locations around Belfast representing the Protestant communities in those areas. They were: Shankill Road, Sandy Row, Grove Tavern in North Belfast and Albertbridge Road in East Belfast. These four separate parades would begin simultaneously at 7PM and converge on the city center, where they would merge and march around the City Hall building.

-As we traveled towards the Shankill, we were somewhat worried that we did not see more obvious signs that a parade was to be taking place. When we first walked onto Sandy Row, there were no visible bands or marchers and a PSNI presence of two officers dressed in standard uniform who were doing nothing to direct traffic. However, within minutes, bands began to appear from the surrounding residential areas. I was struck by how the band members appeared to be dressed in traditional army band uniforms of WWI style with the exception that they had Ulster Freedom Fighter (UFF) patches prominently displayed on their sleeves and shoulders.

-As far as I know, the UFF is a legally prohibited organization, so I wonder how and why this band could so brashly wear the patches of that organization. Does UFF stand for something outside its paramilitary connection much like the first
UVF, and its role in WWI are much different than the paramilitary UVF of the Troubles?

-As we continued walking, we saw more and more people lining the streets. However, the age range was much younger than I had expected. Most people appeared to be in their teens or early twenties, and very few were older than their fifties or so. There were also a number of families with small children who had come out to watch the event.

-As we approached the Shankill and the parade began, the PSNI presence became much stronger, with at least several dozen armored Land Rovers out and about one hundred officers I saw dispersed around the area. There were also at least a dozen PSNI officers on motorcycles working to block traffic and escort the parade as it moved. In addition, there were two helicopters in the sky, one appearing to be a news chopper and the other a police chopper (due to their markings).

-Each band was also accompanied by at least two uniformed parade marshals who appeared to be in constant communication with the PSNI organizing how and where the parade would go. The marshals themselves appeared to be from the same communities the bands were, given their interactions with the members and audiences and appearances (especially dress) as well. What does this says about the supposedly more “problematic areas” of Shankill and Sandy Row when they are so willing to openly work with the police to conduct the event when more “respectable” organizations like the Orange Order refuse to work with the PSNI or Parades Commission?

-In total there were about three dozen different bands. Each was similarly comprised of a lead element of flag bearers who carried the union jack, UVF flags, and the flag of Ulster (some with wreaths of poppies as well) followed by a small number of boys who were twirling and throwing batons. Behind this lead element was the band which most generally was comprised of several snare drums, one large bass drum, and twenty to thirty flutes or fifes. Almost all the bands were exclusively male with members ranging in age from about 15 to 50 years of age. However, there were bands which included females, boys and girls as young as about 5 or 6, and men as old as their late 70s and 80s. Each band had a unique uniform, but they all resembled some form of British military garb from the early part of the 1900s.

-I thought it was very interesting that I saw a number of band members with UVF and paramilitary tattoos, but there was no direct reference to the paramilitary UVF anywhere in the formal festivities. Also, there was no counter demonstration I witnessed from any group, let alone Republicans. What does this say about this commemoration in particular and the general tolerance of Belfast to such events? I suspect such a parade would have been fiercely contested back during the height of the Troubles, if it had even been allowed at all. Has the more subdued nature of Belfast caused this celebration to tone down, or did the toning down of the event cause tension to subside, or some combination there of?
-The music which was played is difficult for me to describe as anything other than military marching music especially classic of the 1800s in America and Great Britain. It focused on choruses by the flutes and heavy percussion interludes, especially at the beginning and end of the piece. I imagine this is very classical of the “blood and thunder” bands we have read so much about as it really did sound like thunder when the drums were all playing. In fact, the base drum, which was always played by some enormous man, was usually played so hard that its sides began to cave in and a second drummer had to walk along side the drum, waiting his turn to relieve the current player.

-Had I not been an outsider in this town, I can definitely see how this event could have struck fear into people who found it an act of intimidation. However, to me it was quite exhilarating and entertaining and the crowds who were watching seemed to share this feeling. However, I wonder how much of this was patriotic pride and how much was a celebration of identity and full fledged attack at those not part of, or not sharing in, that identity?

-Following each band along the sides of the road were what appeared to be local supporters and family members of the band. These groups followed their specific bands from their starting point through the entire parade route until the very end when the band disbanded. Most of these groups were primarily made up of young women between the ages of 14 and 30 who appeared to be the girlfriends of many band members. These groups cheered on the bands, waved flags (which could be purchased from a number of street vendors selling UVF flags and union jacks) and generally seemed to be celebrating the event much like those who attend parades in the United States do.

-However, I did notice that an enormous number of people, especially the young girls, were incredibly drunk. Often it was to the point that they could not walk straight or even fell over in the street. I saw no police action about this intoxication although I am quite certain that a number of those I saw were underage and several of the area were designated as alcohol free zones. What does this say about the drinking culture of the communities taking part and also the role of the police in controlling (and being willing to do so) such events?

-The entire event went on for well over two hours, with the bands making several laps around the city hall building before marching back to where they had come from. All in all the organization of the event appeared to be very good, there was no open violence or intimidation that I saw, relations between the bands, parade marshals, crowds and police seemed very good and ever amicable, and the even seemed to be a big hit for many residents of the city.

May 6th, 2006:

-I had an interview today with some of the command staff of the UVF. It was arranged by Chris Hudson and given the exclusive and secret nature of those individuals I met with and the manner in which it occurred, it was definitely a defining and eye opening moment
in my entire SIT experience. It was a look into the world and minds of a group I (and most others) had never had a first hand introduction to.

-Unfortunately, due to the fact this meeting was so unique in content and context, and on the request of those involved, I am unable to write about much of what happened for reasons of respect and confidentiality. The reader should examine the corresponding write up of my interview for more of an idea on what was said and the reasons for this limited account.

-During my cab ride back from the meeting, I spoke with my driver who was a former British Army soldier who had done a three year tour of duty in Northern Ireland in Belfast. In fact, he had been stationed at a barracks that had been located directly across the street from our accommodations at Queen’s. When I asked him about what it was like to be a member of the security forces, he had some unexpected things to say.

-“It really wasn’t that bad. I was personally involved in two bomb explosions, one while I was at the base, and another while I was on patrol. It kept you on your toes and made life exciting, so it wasn’t all that bad. Besides, the drinking and craic were good so they kept your mind off of it all.”

-I wonder how many people have this feeling about the Troubles? Most of those I have met feel strongly that it was a terrible time and an overall negative experience. I also wonder that if this man had personally lost family or friends to the Troubles whether his attitude would have been so care free? It struck me as well that this attitude might be a coping mechanism from some in dealing with what they saw and experienced.

-“Belfast has changed a lot over the last 15 years, and I think most of it is for the better. Its more peaceful now and people can live normal lives.”

Appendix B:

Note: The information below does not necessarily encompass the entirety of what was said and discussed during a given interview. In some cases, I have recounted to the best of my ability and memory what was said by an individual and thus it is not verbatim. If I have drastically misquoted any one, or misunderstood what they were saying, please accept my sincere apologies.

April 24\textsuperscript{th}, 2006: Interview with Mr. Tom Roberts of Ex-Prisoner Interpretative Center (EPIC).

Biography of Mr. Roberts:
-Former life sentence prisoner who served 13 years from 1980-1993 for a conviction he received while a member of the UVF.
-Joined the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) for personal, and not political or religious reasons. Several friends he had grown up with who had subsequently joined the security forces were injured or killed. The politics of the Troubles would factor into his thinking later, but not when he initially joined.

-His family did not support his decision to join the UVF because of its illegal status. This caused a major rift between him and his family. However, he describes his family as more radical in ideology than he was or has been.

-Joined EPIC in 1996 as an information officer and has since progressed to become director of the organization.

Background of EPIC:
- A group of ex-prisoners and Quakers who were concerned about the reintegration and social issues of ex-prisoners and their families formed EPIC in 1991.

-EPIC focuses specifically on Loyalist ex-prisoners, but was formed in tandem with groups who work with Republican ex-prisoners.

-The work of EPIC has changed notably since the signing of the Belfast Agreement. Originally, its focus lay mostly in helping to facilitate the rights of prisoners (before and after their release), and then helping them to reintegrate back into the community upon release. After the initial influx of prisoners released after the Belfast Agreement, the group’s work changed to helping maintain and consolidate the peace and provide social services for prisoners and other community members alike.

-Some areas that EPIC is involved in include: welfare rights, housing, state benefits, employment (which is important as many jobs in Northern Ireland (NI) are public sector, and a criminal record prevents many ex-prisoners for accessing them), community transport, loyalist political and community initiatives, and research efforts on a variety of loyalist issues.

-EPIC is involved with cross community work with similar Republican groups. However, these relationships have taken a hit in recent years due to questionable activities regard espionage on behalf of the Republican movement. However, the ties still exist and are frequently used.

-EPIC is also directly associated with several other loyalist community groups in the Shankill region. They include Alternatives (a group directly commissioned by EPIC to investigate alternatives to punishment beatings by loyalists), and the West Belfast Cultural and Community Center (which is run by and employs many ex-prisoners and does a large amount with youth and athletics in the community).
EPIC has also worked directly with the PUP, University of Ulster, and Queen’s University Belfast on a variety of political, academic, and community initiatives.

-EPIC was founded by loyalists (especially ex-prisoners) for loyalists, because state agencies were inadequate and unsatisfactory in the services they provided and how they were presented. Those that existed forced ex-prisoners who used them to admit, even if indirectly, their criminal status. This was unacceptable for many loyalists. Thus, EPIC offered a place that ex-prisoners could trust and rely on to adequate assist them in a variety of areas.

On the political status of prisoners/combatants:
-Currently, ex-prisoners have only a criminal record, with no mention or category of the political nature of their crime.

-“The biggest proponents of this policy are other Unionists in the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), and the United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP). Unlike in the Republican community, Loyalists do not have the political representation, or community support in some cases, to fight this label. The closest thing we have is the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) which is a relatively small and minor party in the politics of NI.”

-The lack of political status also means that ex-prisoners are not entitled, in many cases, to compensation from the state in the event of a fire, case of vandalism, or other act which can, rightly or wrongly, be seen as connected to their previous combatant status.

-“Who would want to entire into a new business venture with an ex-prisoner if by doing so potentially endangered the success of the business, along with restricting access to funding and compensation? This knocks out another area (self-employment) where ex-prisoners may be able to support themselves and their families.”

On criminality within paramilitaries:
-Mr. Roberts could only speak indirectly for the UVF, but believed it was widely known and accepted that criminal elements now existed within all paramilitary organizations.

-“The paramilitaries are still very political at the core and for the most part, but there are now offshoots of criminality attached to them as well.”

-“No one is saying the criminality is acceptable, but I think that it can be understandable in some cases. If society and the state already label these individuals (ex-combatants and prisoners) are criminals, and if this label prevents many from finding employment and the means to provide for themselves and their families, or adequately do so, it isn’t hard it imagine how some might turn to criminal activity using the training and structures they gained access to in the paramilitaries.”
“Anyone one who joined a paramilitary organization after the ceasefires of 1994 and the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998 should have their motivation in doing so closely scrutinized.”

Paramilitaries, by their nature, lead themselves to criminality so avoiding this requires careful monitoring of groups objectives and means, as well as membership and promoted ideologies.

On current activities of the UVF:
- “The current focus for the UVF is changing the organization from one with a military focus, to one with a political focus. Unlike many Unionists, most members of the UVF are fairly confident the IRA is abandoning its campaign of violence. This is not to say they are disarming, because that has never been a demand of the UVF. As David Ervine once said, ‘Rust is the best method of decommissioning.’ The UVF was formed because the IRA embarked on a campaign of violence against the loyalist community, and such a paramilitary response was deemed the only thing which could stop it. If the IRA has given up this violent campaign, the need for a militant UVF disappears. The progression from a military focus to a political one has been ongoing over many years, and can be seen in the development of the PUP and the statements and policies of the UVF leadership.”

On other Unionist groups:
- “Mid-Unionists (the DUP and UUP primarily) are hypocrites and have abandoned, sold out and turned against the very Loyalists they formally encouraged and supported.”

-Mid-Unionists were the first to use rhetoric about conflict being inevitable and promoting violent means to defend the union against Nationalists and Republicans. People like Ian Paisley relied on the existence of paramilitary groups to make good on his “you talk to me or you deal with them” stance. When the paramilitaries became more progressive, and more intent on seeking peace and conflict transformation, it threatened the primacy of these parties in Unionist politics. As a result, they turned on loyalists and set out to vilify them in the public eye. Nationalists and Republicans naturally found it hard to trust Loyalists, so Loyalists relied on Unionists to support them, and when this support base was stripped from them, the mentality developed that they were being abandoned and ostracized by all sides.

-“Especially the DUP, but other Unionists as well, utilizes fear voting to gain its support. They realize if they scare people enough, they can gain their support. If they want to practice politics in such a manner that it frightens people and makes their situation worse, that is their choice; but I prefer politics that try and gain support by making people hopeful and committed to changing a given situation in ways which will benefit everyone involved.”
The DUP and other Unionists were, and to an extent still are, willing to slaughter and discriminate within the law, but not outside it. Thus they shun the paramilitaries and do their best to demonize them in ways which are not fair or accurate. I believe this was a similar mentality to that of my family when they supported my brother joining the B-Specials, but had serious problems with me joining the UVF.”

On what he would like to see done by the government in relationship to ex-prisoners and the loyalist community:
- “I would like to see the removal of all legislation that inhibits ex-prisoners for being able to live their lives like normal citizens. The result will be sweeping benefits not only for those individuals, but their families and communities as well.”

April 24th, 2006: Interview with Chris Hudson

Biography:
-Grew up in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) in a Catholic family whose political views could be described as nationalist/republican. He was a practicing Catholic until he was about 14-15 when he lost some of his faith.

-Mr. Hudson’s first real job was as a women’s hairdresser in Britain. For a time while he was in Britain he was a member of the British Communist Party. Describes himself as being very left thinking and leaning at that point.

-When he returned to the ROI his political ideology was changed drastically from when he had left. He joined the Democratic Socialist Party, which had influence and contact with the Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA), and began working on the peace process as well as worker’s rights and trade unions. He became a trade union organizer in 1988. It was his work within labor disputes that he credits as giving him the ability to work with the government of the ROI and the loyalist paramilitaries.

-“I quickly lost the naïve idea that forcing a united Ireland was an acceptable or practical political ideology.”

-“However difficult and seemingly impossible to reconcile the conflict in Northern Ireland may appear, I can promise you there are and have been more complex and irreconcilable problems in labor disputes. Those disputes have eventually been transformed and/or resolved, so I honestly believe the same can be done in Northern Ireland.”

-“ I am not a peace worker or a politician; I am a negotiator and that is how I have always tried to approach what I do. My role in Northern Ireland has been to help explain the actions and opinions of the ROI to the loyalist paramilitaries and vice versa in ways which help the groups
correctly understand one another. My job hasn’t been to create positions, or draw up policy, but try and show that everyone acts with multiple intentions and “faces”. If I am successful, people can see that their positions are not so far apart or irreconcilable.”

-“I like to think of myself as a good communicator and hairdresser, that’s all.”

-In 1988, Chris was a leader in the Peace Train Movement. The idea was to promote the democratic right of people to be able to travel between Northern Ireland and the ROI, and indeed, anywhere in the world. The idea was to bring negative press and public scrutiny to the IRA’s campaign of bombing the rail line between Belfast and Dublin. This was accomplished by loading a train full of people and riding it from Dublin to Belfast and back again. If the train was stopped, or the rail line damaged, they would remain on the train until it was fixed and they were able to proceed. The movement was also set to the background of the Berlin Wall coming down and the collapse of the Soviet Union which had created similar dispute over the movement of people. Thus, the Peace Train Movement picked up momentum and received international press, none of which was expected by its organizers. It also received a very large amount of support from workers’ movements all over the island of Ireland, as well as liberal minded people from a wide variety of backgrounds and political ideologies.

-“When people got on the train, we told them to leave their politics at the door and we really meant it. There was nothing more political about this than everyone on the train believing it was the right of the people to be able to travel freely and without fear. I imagine we had Republicans and Loyalists sitting side by side for days on end as we waited on the train (because of a bomb scare) without either one knowing the other’s political views on Northern Ireland. These were people who were suppose to have nothing in common but obviously they did.”

-Chris first came in contact with loyalist paramilitaries when he met and began political debates with David Ervine of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP). Mr. Ervine and Mr. Hudson agreed that they would take this debate to the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), which Mr. Ervine had been a former member and still had contacts with, for the sake of giving its members a medium through which they could challenge and strengthen their ideals and arguments. Chris was well received by the group and was asked to return on multiple occasions. When the ROI was looking to make contact with the UVF, that group declared they would speak to and through Chris Hudson. From that point on, Chris became the main contact between the government of the ROI and the UVF.

-“When I walked into the first meeting with the UVF, I admit I was scared. I knew these guys could be dangerous and that I was putting myself in a potentially bad situation. However, I felt like I had to give it a try, and if nothing else I could say I had done that. When I came back out, I said to David, ‘I hope they don’t think I am just some liberal peace-
knik,’ to which he replied, “I really don’t think they do.” After that, things just kept progressing and I had more contact with the group. I think I began to understand them and they began to understand me, and as that happened, we found our contact mutually beneficial on a number of levels.”

Especially through the early 1990s, and especially 1994, Chris Hudson is credited with being very influential in securing the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) ceasefire through his work with the UVF. He is also credited with saving hundreds of lives throughout the 1990s as loyalist groups struggled to develop, implement, and maintain their ceasefire by convincing them to maintain the peace, and not resort to violence even when provoked.

“I have heard that some say I saved hundreds of people’s lives. I am not sure how true this is, but to be honest, it doesn’t affect the way I look at what I did. I was trying to take a violent and destructive situation and turn it into something that everyone could be satisfied with and benefit from. If I saved lives along the way, I am terribly happy to have done so, but that wasn’t my specific intention when I entered into my work with the loyalists.”

“Chris would probably never admit this, but I can tell you personally that he is responsible for saving many people’s lives. Whether that is what he set out to do, or a by-product of his work makes no difference, he deserves credit for it and should be proud of that accomplishment.” David Ervine

On the IRA:

“The IRA’s strategy was to make Northern Ireland (NI) unworkable and ungovernable for the British. A big part of this was provoking the British into overreacting to IRA actions and thus soil their image locally, nationally, and internationally.”

“The IRA made the decision to return to war in 1996. This was a decision they consciously made; no one forced them to do it. I think the fact that the loyalists paramilitaries attempted, and largely succeeded, in holding their ceasefire is a testament to their devotion to the peace process.”

On peace work and peace activists:

“There are more egos in peace movements than the paramilitaries in Northern Ireland.”

“Peace makers have to be the protagonists, not any of the parties involved. If one party is seen as the protagonists, it sets the whole process up to fail, as it is seldom acknowledging the complexity of the situation, and puts other groups on the defensive as well as excludes them.”
-“Peace work has to be symbolic and substantive. It must deal with what is actually going on, the reality of the situation, and how to make the violence stop; not just whether the violence should have taken place to being with.”

-“People have to be realistic when it comes to peace work. This doesn’t mean that we can’t dream and be hopeful, but it does mean we have to be willing to accept that our dreams are not as close, and sometimes not as practical, as we may like them to be. I don’t want any utopian dreamers knocking on my door unless they are first willing to deal with the situation at hand. Resolving what is at hand is the only way we can ever hope to make the dreams anything more than dreams.”

On violence and politics:
-“Once violence the violence started, the politics couldn’t work. Political things could and were still happening, but violence added a whole other dimension which caused political progress to be stunted and derailed in many cases.”

-“The Good Friday Agreement (GFA), if nothing else, stopped the violence. It allowed the politics another chance to work without the background of violence further complicating the situation.”

-“With all its imperfections and short comings, politics in the form of democracy works and is the best system. It isn’t perfect, but no system I know of is, and the politics of democracy allows for mistakes and corrections which is hugely important for maintaining peace.”

On his work:
-“I was not engaged with the UVF to promote non-violence, but to get them to set goals, establish their bottom line, and see what they were and were not willing to compromise.”

-“My job was to establish trust with both groups (UVF and the ROI) so that they knew each other’s intentions and bottom lines. This trust and understand is what was deeply lacking between the two groups.”

-“I had to be very careful not to overstate what was happening. I had to be very certain I knew exactly what each group was telling me and not distort that intention when I was relaying it.”

-“Some people have suggested that I could have forced the UVF to take more action more quickly but I disagree completely. I would have broken any trust I had with the UVF if I had forced them in any direction through any means. Besides, I wasn’t there to force them into anything (even if it could have worked, which I highly doubt). What ever steps they took, they had to take on their own accord.”
“A big part of what I did was to help show both the ROI and the UVF that their actions and words often carried multiple meanings. I got them to understand that just as they were under pressure from their supporters to tow the mantras ‘not an inch’ ‘no surrender’ and other ideologies not conducive to negotiation, so too was the other side. Once they understood they were under the same pressures, they began to see the subtitle changes in policy and action on the part of the other party, even when much of what was taking place seemed to mirror what had happened before.”

On what the loyalist paramilitaries want:

“The loyalists wanted three major things out of the ROI. First, they wanted to be included in the peace process. They knew the IRA, the ROI and Britain were talking and they did not like being left out. Second, they did not want the ROI to put Britain too much on the subject of Northern Ireland, particularly on that of the status of the union. They were concerned that ROI pressure on Britain could give an unfair and unrepresentative advantage to those calling for a united Ireland. Third, they wanted a show of respect on the part of the ROI for the union between NI and Britain. It was hard for them to trust a government whose constitution did not acknowledge their right to exist and staked claim to them and their land.”

“Joint authority in NI puts in question the union. If it is going to work and have the support of much of the loyalist community, it has to be made clear that the union is still intact and secure for the influence of the ROI.”

“The loyalist paramilitaries would not, could not, will not and should not be pushed forward. When they were/are ready, had/have the support of their communities, and feel satisfied the union is safe, they would/will move forward. This was true then (in the 1990s) and it is true today.”

On identity, Protestants, and the ROI:

“Ulster Protestants are typically religiously liberal and socially conservative. But this social conservatism is largely a reaction to Republican social liberalism. Ulster Protestants know they do not want to be Republican liberals, and so much of their social policy is generated in opposing terms; the result is that not all of it is really reflective of the population’s opinion on the issues so much as it is a reflection on their desire not to identify with a specific group.”

“Here (NI) it is about identity and not religion or theology.”

“I think that the view many people hold, of the NI conflict being about the Republican revolutionaries being crushed by the bigoted Loyalists and Unionists, is largely incorrect. Certainly, there have been serious issues of discrimination and unfair treatment, but those have largely been dealt with. Still, many see the Protestants as a domineering and discriminatory people which is a totally unjustified view of the vast majority of the population. If they were so close-
minded, why would some of the ‘radicals’ (the paramilitaries) have asked me, a former Catholic from the ROI who is a social democrat, to speak with and for them? Why would they have asked me to come be a minister at a church in NI if they were so bigoted?”

-“The ROI has always claimed it held no grudge or discriminatory practices against Protestants. For the most part, and especially in the last few decades, I think that is true. However, the ROI needs to ask itself some serious questions in regards to this stance. First, how can it be so certain of this when Protestants make up only three percent of its population? Second, how is it treating new immigrant populations and is this something that could be seen to represent how it would treat a larger Protestant population? Finally, why is it that if the ROI is so accepting of Protestants, the vast majority of them feel they must live in a tiny corner of the island which isn’t part of the ROI?”

-“Loyalists are not ideological in the way Sinn Fein and the IRA are. They have always been about defending the status quo. The problem is that some things about the status quo were not good to be defending. Through parties and groups like the PUP, ideas and beliefs such as socialism and working class rights are making many loyalists realize that certain things did need to change. However, while they know things can not and should not go back to the way they were, they do want the union to stay intact.”

April 28th, 2006: William (Billy) Newman of the John McMichael Center

Background:

-I first met Mr. Newman when the SIT group paid a visit to the John McMichael Center during our time in Belfast. He, along with Jackie McDonald (a current brigadier of the Ulster Defense Association (UDA)) spoke with us at that time about the center, community work, ex-prisoners and their role in the community, being a loyalist and that identity, as well as a number of other subjects.

-I came to him on this occasion hoping that he could suggest someone who would speak to me about the politics of paramilitaries. He suggested Jackie McDonald, but we also had a short conversation about the John McMichael Center and other efforts like it as they related to politics.

-Mr. Newman is a project coordinator with the Center and a leading spokesperson to a variety of other organizations and political entities for the work which it does.

On community work in comparison to politics:

-“It is frustrating because often times, at least in this community, community work is well ahead of politics, but politics dictates where funding goes and can have enormous power over people’s thinking about, and reactions to, community work.”
“We try not to be a political organization as in we do not aspire to get a candidate elected to parliament or anything. However, we are well aware of the fact that much of what we do has political consequences.”

May 6th, 2006: Interview with UVF Command Staff

Note: Due to the sensitive nature of this interview, many details concerning the people involved, locations, and descriptions of various events are left out at the request of the interviewees and as decided on by myself. I am quite certain of the credibility of these sources as I was introduced to them through Chris Hudson and Henry McDonald.

The meeting:

-I am certain this meeting could not have occurred if it was not for the help I received from Chris Hudson and his willingness to introduce me to the UVF. All the men involved had a very high opinion of Chris and his work. I can only imagine how long it has taken, and how careful and precise he has had to be to earn this sort of respect and trust. I also believe it points to the secrecy which is still vital to members of the UVF in retaining their positions within the organization and avoiding legal troubles.

-This meeting was held in relative secrecy due to the nature of those who were involved. Although everyone involved was very polite, it was quite obvious that this was to be kept quiet and discreet. It took place in a bar in East Belfast which was relatively small (maybe space for 40-50 people) and in a working class residential area. People in the bar appeared to be familiar with the gentlemen to whom I was speaking and I suspect from this that bar is a place they come regularly. They also appeared, through their actions and mannerisms to be familiar with the lay out of the bar and those working there, as well as the clientele.

On why he joined the UVF:

-“I joined the UVF pre-1969 in 1966 when I was 17 years old. This makes me somewhat unique as at that time it was still a very small and secret organization, and did not have the small ideologies, tactics, or goals that the organization would later develop. In fact, when I first joined, most people thought the UVF was just a myth. No one knew I was part of it, not my family, my friends, or anybody.”

-“I joined for what now seem to be to be naïve and foolish reasons. Unionist politicians where scare mongering at this time about a potential re-rising of the Irish Republic in association with the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916. I was young, impressionable, and excitable, so I wanted to do something to counter this ‘threat’ and I did so through the UVF.”
-The civil rights movement was seen as part of the rising and revolution which they had been warned about.

-“Although the original civil rights protest may have been a different story, I think it is clear now, and I have had several IRA men admit this to me, that the IRA hijacked the movement as a vehicle for the Republican cause.”

-“I guess it means that both Loyalists and Republicans were right in how they viewed the civil rights campaign.”

-“For those joining the UVF post 1969, and I imagine for those joining the IRA as well, it was about hitting back at the other side, and that I what the mission of those two groups became. I think for most members of the UVF it was about vengeance and defense first, and politics came later.”

-“For me the very fact that many members of the security forces were also members of paramilitaries points to the fact that legal measures were limited in what they could do against the IRA. The security forces were not going to be effective against the IRA if they were handcuffed in their efforts. Obviously, the UVF does not have that problem.”

-However, this gentleman made it clear that no official collusion took place between the UVF and state security forces. He admits that some individual transactions and assistance may have occurred (which makes sense in his mind for both paramilitaries and security forces to engage in such activity as it was mutually beneficial) but it was never sought or condoned on an official level.

On the changing mentality of those joining the UVF:

-According to him, those who have joined the UVF since the ceasefire and especially the Good Friday Agreement, have been more attracted to the criminal potential, feeling of membership in a group with power, and group mentality in general of the UVF. Those who joined before this time tended to be more interested in defense, revenge, and politics.

-He announced to me that as of the last few months, the UVF is no longer actively or officially recruiting any members.

On how the UVF has changed over time, and support for the organization:

-A major difference is that the organization has gone from very small and secretive to large and more public.
“As more people joined and the operations undertaken became larger, discipline and secrecy suffered as a result. Our members became known to their communities and beyond sometimes, and we lost the image of a stealthy militant group.”

He pointed out that with the relatively small population size of Northern Ireland and Belfast it was easy for everyone to know one another, even across the sectarian divides.

Community support has always existed for the UVF, to varying degrees depending on things like the success of the group in defending the community and the political climate of the time. However, he is certain that fear of the UVF also generated some of its support, especially as criminality became a larger problem and more of a public focus.

“Unfortunately, the support for the UVF does not reflect itself in votes. But if you go to a UVF commemoration parade, and you see the streets lined with thousands of people, those people aren’t made to be there and I think it gives you and idea of the sort of support our organization has.”

On whether the advances and progress made in the peace process and political scene of Northern Ireland would have been possible without the violence:

“If nothing else, the violence which exploded in Northern Ireland prevented Britain from taking the easy out and allowing a united Ireland.”

“It wasn’t the intention, but I believe violence probably made politicians on both sides compromise on subjects and at times they otherwise would not have.”

He was of the opinion that some politicians used violence as a fear and rhetoric tactic to gain support.

“To some it was always, ‘Either you talk to us or you deal with them,’ while for others they used the violence to scare people into voting for them through exaggeration.”

“Perceptions are almost always more important than the truth so what people have perceived as the reasons behind the violence at various times have always taken precedence over the actually facts.”

On why the UVF moved from way from violence and towards politics:

This gentleman was adamant that the UVF had always been of and for the communities from which its members came. Thus, as those communities began to ask for peace and dialogue, the UVF responded accordingly by trying to provide those things.
-“We didn’t parachute in from Mars. We have always been very much part of the communities which gave rise to our members.”

-“We had to convince our communities that the union was safe while the Republicans did the exact opposite. Doing that simultaneously was not easy, and presented a tough political challenge to the UVF.”

-“In my mind, our military campaign was more successful than our political one has been thus far. Politics were relatively successful after the ceasefires and though the Good Friday Agreement but faltered afterwards.”

-“People in our communities like the PUP but because it is so small, consider a vote for it a wasted vote.”

On what the UVF is currently trying to do as an organization:

-“We are trying to move off the stage.”

-According to him, since politics was the road of the future, there was no need for an active military association like the UVF. However, this did not mean that changes in the political situation could not altered and impede this process by making the need for such a group (even in the future) seem more apparent. For instance, British and Irish statements about a plan B if Stormont did not succeed have had a negative impact on the standing down process as they make some members uneasy.

-“Every member, and I mean every member, has been consulted in the process of trying to stand down as a group. We do not intend to leave anyone behind who can be brought along with us in this process.”

On the relationship between Unionism and the UVF:

-“Unionism has largely used and abused the UVF for its own political gains. We have been the big stick in the mentality that, ‘You can either work with us, or deal with them.’ However, when we made good on that threat through violence, we were almost completely abandoned, and absolutely so publicly.”

-“Now politicians from Unionism are beginning to talk with us again behind the scenes. They want to be able to claim victory and credit for the eventual standing down of the UVF, or be able to claim that they can ‘deliver’ the UVF in a political situation. No one, and I mean no one, can claim or deliver Loyalism but Loyalism itself.”

On criminality:
-“I want to make this very clear, the UVF does not sanction or condone criminality on any level, full stop. However, we cannot account for every member of our organization, just like no other group outside the paramilitary realm can do so either. The British government, the Irish government, the political parties of Northern Ireland, the PSNI, all of them have criminal happenings and members but they never receive the same sort of attention because they do not have the background of the UVF, but in actuality the circumstances of that crime are not all that different.”

-When I said that some people have suggested the UVF was not doing all it could to control or stop criminality within its ranks I received a very direct answer.

-“How can they make that claim? We have taken people’s lives because they were involved in crime. I would say that points to us being more committed than many others to ending and controlling criminality.”

-He also pointed out that when widespread and full-scale conflict comes to an end, often times criminality creeps in. Crime can be very lucrative and as a result attracts many individuals to it.

-“Drugs were never an issue in our communities until the UVF began to stand down. Its hard to balance the standing down process with continuing to maintain discipline and police your organization, let alone your communities.”

On how the ceasefire came about:

-“It was really very simple. Our communities wanted peace so we had to ask ourselves if what we had been fighting against, and defending, was safe. The big issues were whether the IRA was genuine in its ceasefire and whether the union with Britain was safe. The evidence for both seemed to suggest that they were, and we used that as the basis to create our ceasefire. If this hadn’t been the case, there would have been no ceasefire.”

On being genuine in intent:

-“There is a tendency for the media to suggest that we are not genuine in what we are doing, in standing down and maintaining the peace. But I think they forget or over look the fact that we are the ones who have maintained our ceasefire all this time and played an active role in the peace process.”

Miscellaneous comments:

-“I am Irish and British and proud to be both.”
“There are so many contradictions in history and politics that it makes it almost impossible to pass any sort of legitimate judgment on events, people or organizations.”

Direct Transcriptions:

Partial interview with Tom Roberts, director of the Ex-Prisoner Interpretative Center (EPIC), former member of the UVF and an ex-prisoner on April 24th, 2006:

Alec Chiquoine (AC): Do you believe that Loyalist concerns are properly addressed within the current political situation now, or do you believe there is an under representation of communities such as this or the people you work with?

Tom Roberts (TR): I feel there is an under representation of the people that really represent these communities. The problem here is that people vote as a result of fear. There is fear voting, particularly on the part of the DUP, which has been particularly adept at rising people’s fears about the other community and I think they use that quite...(long pause) I fail to find a word for it but they use it for their own benefit rather than the benefit of the people they are representing. I think they are actually exploiting people because if they keep that fear up, the vote increases proportionally. But whether they do a job for the actual people on the ground is another story.

AC: Another aspect of what I am looking at in my research is, especially in the Loyalist community, the move from violence to politics and grassroots community work within the paramilitaries. In your opinion can any or the whole of Loyalist past violence be justified and why have people now decided their needs and voices are better represented by going through political and community means rather than paramilitary involvement?

TR: I spoke with you earlier there about that, but I feel that the justification for Loyalist violence came from the fact that the IRA was inflicting violence on our community has we seen it and we reciprocated in kind. And therefore, as I said before, if the IRA are genuine in ceasing their armed struggle and inflicting causalities on our community then we will reciprocate, or at least I would like to think that is what we would and have done. All the evidence has shown this to be the case.

AC: I know that especially early on there was a very strong sense of commitment and support between the paramilitaries and the communities that they were defending and representing. Do you feel a lot of that connection between community and paramilitary has disappeared now, has it changed, and what are the reasons for that?

TR: It has changed quite a bit, you know, and certainly in the 1970s, to a lesser degree in the ’80s they (the communities) would very much have seen themselves as under the threat of armed Republicanism and there was a cohesion between the paramilitaries and the communities from which they emanated. I suspect that post ceasefire some of the
people who joined paramilitary groups didn’t join it for the reason of God and Ulster or the country, but for different reasons. A lot of these people then were responsible for creating that criminal rung that I talked about that the community has responded to negatively. The combination of the minority criminal element that exists and the fact that there is no longer this Republican sort of domiciles hanging over their head, people don’t see the need for paramilitaries any more. And I think that paramilitaries, especially the UVF, recognize the fact that they need to transform as well to suit the changing conditions.

AC: How do you think that groups such as EPIC and organization like the UVF are going to…it seems that especially post ceasefires and post Good Friday Agreement that what they have really come to represent are working class, socialist to a degree demographics within this area. How do you think they are going about trying to move to that being the focus, and away from community defense as IRA violence as dropped off, to presenting more politic side of what they are doing?

TR: As I said, within Loyalism there is a greater difficulty getting involved in mainstream politics because of the reluctance of Protestants and Unionists to give the mandate to somebody such as them. But a lot of former paramilitary activists are performing very good work within, in and around things like interface problems, the marching issue, and a lot of former paramilitaries are involved in mediation processes and using their context to bridge the divide through those situations. They are also helping to develop their communities amongst various other things. There is a lot of community activism, which is seeing the paramilitary activism being replaced by community activism.

AC: If your organization were to sit down with the DUP and UUP and actually able to have a conversation with them, what is your message to them, what is it you are trying to get across to them in terms of support you would like to see between the various Unionist and Loyalist parties?

TR: I think that if there was something I would want from the DUP it would be for them to offer the same analysis to the people, in respect to the IRA, as what our analysis is, which is that the IRA do not present a violent threat to Unionist and Protestants. But I feel they would be reluctant to do that because the IRA is their recruiting source. You know, I don’t have a great deal of time for people who put their politics before the well being of their people. If you want to build a career on people’s misery… I think the more positive thing for Unionist to do, mainstream Unionists to do, is to give a proper analysis of where the IRA is going.

AC: If were to be looking at trying to figure out what exactly what the political message of the Loyalist community is, and what the people here are really looking for out of their politics and the sources, what ever they may be, where that comes from, are there any questions I should be asking that I haven’t, or any organizations that I should talk to who I haven’t?
TR: In terms of the UVF the message is relatively simple. They are prepared to bow to the will of the people, provided that will is exercised democratically. They don’t have a problem with anything else. Their problem is the constitutional position within Northern Ireland which they deem to be safe at the moment. As long as the Unionist people are able to exercise their democratic right that is what the UVF is about. The UVF is quite different than the IRA in that every IRA man, to a man, would be a Sinn Fein voter where as the UVF is a broad church. You have DUP, UUP and PUP voters within the UVF, so you know I is much like Protestantism where there is quite a bit of diversity there, where as in Catholicism there is a more homogeneous unit if you like. If you look at Protestants really, if they don’t agree with what the minister is saying they go and build a tin hut and start preaching themselves. I value that diversity and I think diversity enriches a society so we should accommodate it.

-Interview with David Ervine, MLA for the PUP in East Belfast, ex-prisoner, and former member of the UVF on April 25th, 2006:

Alec Chiquoine (AC): How would you describe the PUP and its constituents in contrast to other Unionist and Loyalist political groups?

David Ervine (DE): Well, first of all I would describe the PUP as a socialist party but when you say socialist party people connote Pol Pot, Stalin, etc. I think my definition would be caring politics. But I am not so sure I could describe the PUP’s constituency, because we are going through a process of change in the PUP. We burst on the scene at a time of major change. So I think that those who perceive that we appeal to an expressly working class Unionist populous must recognize that most of the working class Unionist populous don’t vote for us, and that there are some middle class people who do vote for us. So it is rather a mixed bag of people who vote for the Progressive Unionist Party, and in part I believe that has to do with the process of change. All the reasons I think we do not do as well as people expected me might in the working call Protestant community is because we are: one, telling them they were wrong, and people don’t like to be told they were wrong, secondly, I think we are much quicker to continence dealing with the devil. Now let me define devil. We only know how good our propaganda was when we try to do a deal with those we propagandized. Our communities demonize one another. When you have a process of exploration for peace, you then have a community which is aghast when you want to be reasonable with the “demon.” There is a bit of that, and also the politics have changed in that there is fear. Fear encourages communities to rush to the lowest common denominator, very often the loudest voice. So, when someone for instance shouts, “Sell out!” it takes a second to say and perhaps and hour to refute, so the arguments are not of the weight. You could even argue they are not of the same validity but certainly they are hard and difficult to fight against. The Progressive Unionist Part I suppose is a strange animal in that it is immensely liberal in its politics. It is immensely liberal in its politics for a number of reasons, but one very serious reason is that measured against conflict regions, conflict regions are less inclined to be reasonable about abortion, pro-choice, they are less inclined to be sympathetic to gay and lesbian rights, they are less sympathetic to domestic violence.
because the over arching nightmare of the conflict has suppressed their capacity for liberalism. So in recognition of this, the PUP has been pushing the boundaries out, trying to make up time for that which has been lost, crush beneath the nightmare of the conflict.

AC: In your mind, are the current things which are seen as different between Loyalist and Unionists valid and also what are they?

DE: There are three definitions, Unionist, Loyalist, and Protestant and then there is Nationalist, Republican, and Catholic. Now, the differences between Nationalist and Republican are much more logical than those between Loyalism and Unionism. I would argue the concept of Loyalism was invented to distance the Unionist from what were seen to be the excesses of the Protestant working classes. So, given that they are all Unionists, at least they are all pretty much Unionists, you wonder where the name Loyalist comes from. A Loyalist is less likely to be wealthy. No matter how far back you go in these Troubles, I argue that the word Loyalism and its definition were invented to distance the Unionists from the excesses.

I have to say that I worry sometimes how these badges are worn. Let me give you an example. Democratic Unionist Party councilor gets into a rift with the police. The headline from the media’s point of view is “Loyalist councilor.” Of course, he is a Unionist councilor for as long as he behaving well, but the minute he behaves badly or is perceived to behave badly, he becomes a Loyalist. That is only one example of many. For many in society, certainly in the media and within certain elements of Unionism, and tragically, tragically, within the Nationalist community, Loyalists fit somewhere between the heal and sole of one shoe, and smell terrible. And I think it is almost a form of racism, the way the working classes Unionists are defined…they are Unionists. I am almost pleased with Martin Maguinness, who is very high in Sinn Fein, when he talks about Unionist paramilitaries, because that is what they really are. This “Loyalist paramilitary” label almost makes them apart from the society from which they come which clearly does not make any sense. They are from the communities which make up Northern Ireland and yet somehow they are an illusionary process that Nationalists, Unionists, and above all the media seek to set apart, but of course they are not apart, they are very much a part there of.

AC: In your mind what are the most striking changes that have taken part in Northern Ireland especially since the 1990s to the present, and how has the PUP adapted and reorganized to reflect those changes?

DE: There are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people alive who would otherwise likely be dead. That is one of the differences. The other difference is that for the first time ever, using the definitions which are afforded us by others, Nationalist, Republican, Catholic…Protestant, Unionist, and Loyalists, all have made an agreement for the first time ever, in junction with two global, and with George Mitchell and Bill Clinton’s involvement you could argue three, governments. In that respect that is a first, and that is new. What we’ve got is time and space for an exploration. And we find ourselves even today in 2006 in a major political crisis where it is almost pleasurable to experience the crisis because it is the first time, certainly in my lifetime, that such a
crisis has not be accompanied by violence. Something is happening to us. With that respect I fancy that had we have the skills...three hundred years ago, or eight hundred years ago, or 90 years ago, whenever this country began to tear itself apart, to go back and begin to resolve that conflict. The problem is that we are not trying to resolve just that conflict, but every subsequent day as well. The pollutant of violence is greatly emotional and very, very difficult and means even greater PR and propaganda we are trying to work against.

The PUP in most respects tries to tell it as it is. And that is probably a very arrogant statement, because doesn’t everyone try and do that, so how dare I try and say I tell it better than anybody else, but tragically I think we do. I think we do for a very sad reason...and that is there is a pension in tribes and communities to almost like chimpanzees touch each other’s anal parts for comfort. You know, fuel each other in the rightness of where they are. Of course the truth is that I have never lived in a normal society...I have lived in an absolutely abnormal society, and a society where one really does have to question one’s self, ‘Did our society become polluted because paramilitaries grew and existed or was it pollution before that which lead to the growth of paramilitaries?’ When you talk to the SDLP, the SDLP will give you a half way house of, “Yes it was all wrong and then paramilitaries came along.” But they remove all the focus the first part and focus on the paramilitaries instead. The DUP will focus it all on paramilitaries. I mean they won’t even want to talk about their history. And the Republicans will tell you it was all the fault of the Brits. Somewhere stuck in the middle of all this is the PUP saying, “Now hold on a minute, we are an abnormal society and abnormal societies must do abnormal things to work themselves towards normality.” And it is therefore about telling my people not what they want to hear, but telling my people, “Let us be honest with ourselves,” because if we are not honest with ourselves, then we enter a situation of denial...and if we enter a situation of denial then there is always the danger for others to do what we have already been through. So the PUP tries to tell it as it is and, as many argue with some justification, to our own detriment. But then again, maybe we aren’t really politicians at all. Maybe we are just paramilitaries who came out of the darkness having come out of the darkness we don’t want anyone to follow where we were, so therefore we have to challenge them. That is what I wish...I wish there had been someone to challenge me when I joined a paramilitary.

**AC:** So there was no one to challenge that decision for you?

**DE:** No there wasn’t and that made it a much easier decision for me.

**AC:** It seems that one of the things I have always found difficult, given my background growing up in a small town in the mid-west of the US, was that choice and decision to join a paramilitary organization. To be willing to take up arms for a cause and be willing serve long prison terms and even possibly be killed or kill as a result of that membership. It is a commitment that I am unfamiliar with...I am not sure if I were placed in that situation how I would react. How did you make that decision when you were younger, and then how did it progress into this political ideology?
DE: Well I trust in universal terms for any one who joins paramilitaries there are a large number who followed the same pattern as me. Up until I was 19 I avoided joining, I had been…if you like targeted for recruitment and had always said no. Then it was my 19th birthday and I was celebrating my 19th birthday as a series of bombs were going off around Belfast killing people. One of the guys who was killed was called Ervine, and he was 18 and he lived just a couple streets away from me and I thought, “That could have been me.” It was then that I joined the UVF.

One of the questions I think that is very painful to try and answer is that if there were an engine that encouraged me, or enhanced my move towards paramilitary involvement, how many engines did I become, or enhancement for young Catholics and Republicans did I create by my actions? I am clear in my own mind that was not part of my thinking at that time. I don’t apologize for my actions. When asked why I did what I done, I didn’t know what else to do. People sometimes think that is a cope out, but it is as close to an honest answer as I can give…I didn’t know what else to do. When all hell is breaking lose, when there are blood and brains in the street…flight or flee I suppose was maybe in my mind at the time. Maybe it is the ignorance and arrogance of youth where you believe attack is the best form of defense. I suppose that mentality is why we are in Iraq and Afghanistan.

AC: I resonate towards what you are saying with that because I do think American has had that same sort of reaction to a situation where you have your back against the wall and you don’t know what to do…

DE: The only thing is that I would counsel today about having the reaction I had is that violence is not an answer. Having said that, societies are frightened and when societies are frightened, they do silly things…I did silly things and take responsibility for those things. I am a completely different human being to that individual then. I am not a completely different human being because I had an instant “road to Damascus” conversion, but I am completely different because of experience, questioning, challenging, and analyzing…all those things that come with pain.

I probably said it to your group before but why do people hate people they don’t know? And again, it is all part of our PR propaganda process. It’s not a thought process, it’s a taught process. Our society, I have said to you that I have never lived in a normal society it was quite abnormal, had that hate process there long before paramilitaries ever came along. I can remember vividly shouting at the age of 14, “We are the people!” Totally unaware that meant some others were not the people. There is a tragedy about this society… I am from the ascendancy don’t you know, I am from the Protestant majority but the average national pass rate for an examination at 11 years of age is 27%. In working class Catholic areas the pass rate is 12%. In working class Protestant pass rate is 3%… that brings me to come kind of conclusion on the affairs of mankind in terms of historical perspective. I could probably

Break in recording as tape had to be changed

DE: We are lead to believe that being one rung higher on the latter than someone else is a great place to be. There is a lot to answer for in societies which foster difference, but
not only foster difference for their own gain. Doing so subjugates people, and you can only subjugate a people so long. Sooner or later they will rebel.

AC: Do you believe there is a way, or that the PUP has been successful in communicating that ideology to other groups because of your experiences…

DE: The DUP when the PUP was very, very core to creating the Loyalist ceasefire, the DUP described that ceasefire as, “Hard men gone soft.” That is the same DUP that will give you total vilification of paramilitaries; but that is the definition that gave it, hard men gone soft. But people don’t seem to remember that. Not a lot of people seem to remember Ian Paisley never mentioned criminality as a barrier to doing nice things in this society when civil rights marches were being attacked; or indeed that the moderate Nationalist political elements in society were always marginalized by Unionism who wouldn’t trust them. You know, so constantly the more the Unionist community through its leadership has refuted the right of the Catholic population to be heard so the Catholic population offered them a different volume… a more strident and difficult problem. It brings me to the conclusion that sometimes majorities that behave badly end up being dragged screaming and kicking to logical places. And that’s been the history of Unionism in Northern Ireland.

AC: There is a theory in international political economics that people are not willing to undertake significant economic change until the negative effects of the current economic system outweigh the negative effects or sacrifices people must make in the switch to a new system. Do you believe that theory can actually be seen as applicable within the context of the Northern Ireland politics?

DE: Well I think if we asked those who researched such work, one of the biggest factors in that decision-making process would be fear…fear of loss. That is what this is about, the concept of the fear of loss. My argument would be that it is fear of loss of an illusion. No one in Northern Ireland had power, no one! All power was derived from Westminster. I mean the United Kingdom is a nation of 60 million people and Northern Ireland has only 1.7 million of those 60 million. We had no power, but the illusion was that somehow in order to take power, you had to share power, and sharing power was somehow a loss. You could argue that is you were allowed to have 58% of the power that would be 58% more than you had. But somehow or another, people like the DUP have constantly sold it has 42% of a loss…which doesn’t add up! I think that it is very difficult to…maybe a psychologist is required…after you get your degree you can decide to get another degree in psychology and come back and have a look at some of these questions that I would like answered. Why do people not do that which is in their best interest? Why do people hate people they don’t know? Why do people find themselves in situations where fear…or the tragic existing conditions are considered substantially superior to the potentially wonderful conditions? That is an issue of change and an issue of fear…we know human beings are like that. The psychology of how the hell we got to where we are is worth looking at, not just the violence but including the violence. I would like an exposé on what happened to us as a people, not even to castigate individuals, but in a collective sense, what happened to us?
AC: Along the idea of this fear of loss, I think one of the difficulties many of my group, as American students had, was understanding the strong sense of identity within Loyalism and Unionism that is related to the union with Great Britain. It is especially confusing in that it appears that many of these individuals who feel strongly about this relationship, have benefited the least from it and yet given the most to preserve it. What is in this union, why is it such an important connection to make?

DE: Well I know that people do struggle to make that connection, but it’s rather strange as we are closer to you than you imagine. Because contained inherently within Protestantism was the comfort with the separation of church and state…and as a result a historical abortion began to happen. For instance, my parents were born pre-partition and were Irish until 1937 when the Republic of Ireland created a new constitution because it had separated from the United Kingdom. The first page, the very first page of that constitution was allegiance to the Holy See and the Pope. Now, this is Ireland, and Italy is over there somewhere. Your constitution guarantees the separation between church and state, so the mindset of this issue within Unionism is phenomenally closer to the constitution of the United States. The Irish constitution has changed now by the way, thankfully it has changed, but that was in 1937 the first page of the Irish constitution, allegiance to the Holy See.

Another issue is the abandonment of all things British is getting rid of the union. Even though you walk around Dublin, and tell me it isn’t like a British city. Walk around Boston and tell me it isn’t a British city. The fact you are throwing the baby out with the bath water was an indication for people like my parents that they didn’t want to be Irish. If that is the definition of being Irish, than I can’t go there. So there was a retreat from Irish identity by those who were uncomfortable with this.

You know, history has dealt us some terrible and interesting cards and that was one pollutant, not withstanding the pollutant of violence which played a big role in the conflict. And Protestants in Northern Ireland hold stronger affinities with and for certain parts of England and sometimes an affinity for Ireland which is stronger than the connection to Britain, especially in some sporting matches.

This connection is probably a safety mechanism and it goes back to our religion. It goes back to the sense of the fear of the control of the state by the Catholic church, which is bad enough if you are Catholic but radically difficult if you are Protestant. Having said that, there was a degree of much more calamity played out here. It was a Protestant state for a Protestant people and a Catholic state for a Catholic people and we fed off the extremes of each other and that abortion history has been very detrimental and difficult for us to reconcile. Take away the fear and we begin to see a different side of people. Whether it is the haunting myth of de Valera’s constitution, which is now gone, or the lingering doubt that somehow or another Catholics in life want something different than Protestants but of course they don’t…they both want very much the same, this almost illusionary difference begins to melt away. I think this difference again is very much a taught process and not a thought process.

My own honest opinion is that the multi-cultural democracy which is the United Kingdom is to be valued. But then Ireland is now becoming a multi-cultural society although in only relatively recent times. Nothing is standing still.
AC: To switch the subject a little bit, if issues of discrimination and equal political representation which have plagued Northern Ireland historically can be more thoroughly addressed, do you think the idea of a maintained union can be sold to a portion of the Nationalist community?

DE: I think it has almost always been the case that there are people within the Nationalist community who faced with a seismic shift would say no. What logic was there when Unionism attacked civil rights marches when Catholic people carried banners saying, “British rights for British citizens,” and we said no? Now we would give our eyeteeth just for them to say they were British. So, how much of the moderate portion of Nationalism did we marginalize by saying no and only coming to logical positions dragged screaming. We didn’t help moderate opinions within the Nationalist community. I think that Northern Ireland clearly functions under a very straightforward situation at the moment, Northern Ireland shall remain part of the United Kingdom so long as it is the wish of the majority to do so. That is enshrined since the Good Friday Agreement. Of course the reverse of that is that if Northern Ireland doesn’t want to remain part of the UK, whether one is an a la carte democrat. I am not an a la carte democracy, I will accept the will of the people with one proviso…the concerns of the Nationalist community, many of them were real so we are now not a society that must only be fair, but a society which must be seen to be fair, so the degree of checks and balances is huge. Having filtered all of those checks and balances in, if we were to find a greater number of people in Northern Ireland wanted to be part of a united Ireland, I think I would have the right to seek that society not only being fair, but also being seen to be fair.

AC: You expressed the opinion to my group when we first met that many Unionists considered you and your fellow PUP members worse than Sinn Fein and the IRA. I have also heard from many Loyalists ex-prisoners and ex-combatants that they feel very excluded, shunned and ostracized, not only from the communities they once were defending but also many political circles such as the DUP and UUP. What can be done to combat this animosity and distrust within Unionism and its various sects?

DE: Well I think one of the things is actually coming to terms with who we are, and that is this argument about what happened to us as a people. Find me five people who are complicit in the state of this nation. You know the way President Bush gives an address, well lets assume we are looking at the state of our nation…find me five people who are not ex-prisoners who will say, “Yes, I am complicit in the bad state of our nation.” You see, it is always someone else’s fault and its always someone else’s responsibility, and with the excesses of Unionism that is why the DUP and the UUP don’t want to fix it on the abnormality before paramilitaries, but only the abnormality after the paramilitaries. They want to look at the effect and not the cause and that is a form of sanitizing themselves.

AC: One of my final questions to you then is a question about the future. Where do you see the PUP going in terms of political ideology and policies you would like to promote
not only within the peace process but also in the large political happenings of Northern Ireland?

DE: Well there are tragically a cadre of political animals and they cut across almost all the political parties and it guarantees almost that I can’t talk bout political policies, that all I am allowed to talk about as far as the media are concerned are punishment beatings and punishment shootings and the excess of the UVF. My views on education are not sought at least not very often, and very seldom listened to. So we have some work to do to fight our way into the mainstream. That is a very negative view I have offered you but one of the things I think is of some significance is that you can love us or hate us but you can’t ignore us, sooner or later we will be heard. One of the reasons why I am contested within Unionism rather than the Nationalist community is because I might take their votes. But I mean, in all honest I have to say that if my society finds peace, genuine peace, and a price of that is the demise of the PUP, well then so be it. Peace is more important.

But I think the Progressive Unionist Party can, if the media allows it…it does and it can play a specific role. If we live in the market place and every time we are asked a question in explodes in that market place like an Exocet missile and we rush into the corner in our homogeneity of pain and victim-hood to be driven by the lowest common denominator, it seems vital to me that within the market place we have debate that does not get engendered from the outside. Instead of the debate coming from the outside asking questions of Unionism, it is time Unionism was asking questions of itself. I mean my definition of being a Unionist is I am and Irish citizen in the United Kingdom. Try finding many people within my community that would describe themselves as such. Some of them will tell you they are Ulstermen, some will tell you they are British, you get this strange cobbled identity…you should ask Unionists to explain what they are to you. One of the big questions is does Unionism mean to be anti-Catholic and I think the logical answer to that is no. Does it mean to be anti-Irish and I think the logical answer to that is no. So therefore why is it seen to be anti-Irish and anti-Catholic? What is wrong with us in our own concept of that definition? What is it we are afraid of?

AC: Well I want to thank you very much for all the time you have given me. Is there anything I haven’t asked that you feel I should have, or any points you would like to make or clarify?

DE: While you are still on the island of Ireland, the Northern Ireland Assembly will reconvene. It has been given a deadline of the 24th of November to either sink or swim. My best guess is that it will swim. I think if I had any point to make, it is that whatever our history may have been I am phenomenally more fixated on tomorrow than with yesterday. I have been driven almost hamster like by history and the way to rework or out work a history is to build a common purpose. We as a people may never find common allegiance between those who advocate a united Ireland and those who advocated a union with Britain, but there is sure as hell evidence all around us that there is ample opportunity to find common purpose. The finding of that common purpose will involve the building of relationships and the building of relationships will begin to map out a new phase of peace. It is time we stopped talking about the Good Friday
Agreement and started thinking about the mundane delivery of services to the population which is the purpose of parliamentary democracy in this building. Doing so will create role models in our government and those role models will map out a path to the future.

Interview with Roy Garland of the UUP, member of the UUP executive council and UUP consultant in Sandy Row on Friday, April 28th 2006:

Note: This interview is transcribed in abbreviated form.

Alec Chiquoine (AC): What does the title “Unionist” mean to you?

Roy Garland (RG): To me it means believing in the union with Britain. I think the Unionist community represents a minority on the island of Ireland…it is so complicated…but I think the Unionist community is a community that feels vulnerable in the Irish context. We are a majority up here, but we have always felt vulnerable. There is a fear within Unionism that we are in decline here like Unionism was in the Republic around the time of partition. By rejecting imperialism and Britain, the Irish Republic was rejecting us as well. Certainly things have changed recently, but I still feel that it is implicit in the Irish mindset and even written into the laws and Constitution. The nation talks about encompassing all the people of Ireland, but we feel it doesn’t include us and it doesn’t include us. I consider myself Irish, but I don’t consider myself part of the Irish nation and they don’t consider me part of it either.

To be Unionist means to value the British way of life and not to want independence for Ireland. I believe in Home Rule for Northern Ireland and more recently I support good relations with the Republic. But I believe there are benefits to be British.

AC: Other than the constitutional question, are there other political ideologies that make Unionism distinct from say Nationalism?

RG: I think there are economic aspects of the welfare state that go along with the Unionist position. Unionism to me means a community where different cultures co-exist. The Irish Republic does not embrace this same sort of openness or at the very least, not until recently…it was a Catholic, Gaelic, Republican state. Having said that there are elements here within the Unionist community that are not open and inclusive in all the ways that I would like to see. But I think in general we can be seen as a wider, broader, more open society as opposed to the South which is more narrow.

AC: Why, given the alternatives within Unionist politics, do you believe people support the UUP?

RG: Well the main parties are the UUP and the DUP. The UKUP is down to virtually one man and the PUP is not very strong in this area (Sandy Row). The PUP would be effective for some working class Unionists from Loyalist backgrounds and would espouse left of center policies. The UUP is a fairly broad church. The DUP comes from a narrow religious background. I would see the DUP as more akin to what we didn’t want in the Republic in terms of religious dominance. Of course, the DUP is moving away from that position, they are actually following us. The difficulty for us is that
within the party there has been a big squabble as to what we are. From the beginning of the Troubles, the UUP tried to bring in changes that the civil rights association wanted, while Paisley was out there protesting them. It was suggested that if we didn’t accept the reform we might get revolution. It was crazy that we didn’t do more to accept the civil rights reforms.

The DUP is stalling the current government with the claim that it does not want to enter into power sharing with just Sinn Fein because it of its links with terrorism, but they actually opposed power sharing when it was first introduced. You have to bear in mind that they are changing now, but that they have the “old ways” in mind and that is really the crux of the issue. Now they are having to decided what ways are going to be pursued, and I think it will end up that the DUP follows a path similar to the UUP is trying to move forward in Northern Ireland, but currently they are not doing a very good job of it.

AC: What distinction if any do you make between Loyalists and Unionists?

RG: Loyalists are essentially working class Unionists with a slightly left of center bias. In the past the Unionist Party contained all these contradictions. These working class people I think began to realize they were working for a contradiction, and more conservative party, and decided to break away somewhat. Unionism at the time had such a spread in who was encompassed by it that some fractioning was almost inevitable in my mind especially on issues beyond the constitutional issue.

So we had a constituency within Unionism that was…I don’t want to say Socialist as that might be too strong a term, but left of center right through to moderate progressives. Especially up until recently, these progressives had a significant amount of influence in the party. What has happened is that the working class during the conflict believed that we were under attack by the IRA, so they fought a war as they saw it against the IRA. Of course then they were disowned by Unionists a bit, and at one stage they might have even been a bit used by them, but they have been disowned now so they formed their own party. They also in the early 1990s said, and this is significant because these people have guns, they said, “Make a deal,” and the Unionists didn’t make a deal so they said, “Well, we will have to do it ourselves.” And they were quite influential in encouraging people to consider a deal with Nationalists. Gusty Spence and others were the first to open up dialogue with Nationalists and Republicans, and in a sense if Loyalists could do it others could do it. But then there came the attempt to demonize them as left wing rebels themselves.

AC: You office here is located in an area know for its paramilitary involvement. How does your office work to deal with these individuals and the communities which they come from and have at times been supported by?

RG: Well, they are Unionists themselves, and so this is their constituency office. Don’t forget as well that both the UVF and UDA, within them, they do not always vote for the PUP, UPRG or UDP, and quite often vote for the DUP and UUP. There is amore of an awareness of working class issues now so Unionists need to represent those interests in they are going to get the votes. I suppose to try and reach that…your vote comes from right across the community so you have to try and reach out. We know who the Loyalists
are and would represent their interests in some areas and not in others. That is just the way of it, because in middle class Unionist areas, many of them don’t have time at all for the Loyalists, so you have to try and work with both.

**AC:** What sort of problems are of particular importance to this community currently?

**RG:** Housing, anti-social behavior, pests, just about anything, you name it. A lot of what we do is on a very day-to-day personal level for those people who come in, like dealing with noisy neighbors or repairing blocked street gutters. If there is trouble brewing up, we try and contain it or head it off before it gets out of control. Most of the trouble is related to the sectarian divide, but not all of it.

**AC:** The UUP has recently fallen behind the DUP in terms of total numbers of MLAs, what do you believe can be done to counter act this and bolster the support for the UUP?

**RG:** The UUP has had many of its efforts and policies distorted in the public eye and in some cases has not even been successful in explaining itself for many reasons. One is certainly the manipulation of what has happened and is happening with the peace process by the DUP and UKUP. I mean, you are trying to reach an agreement with terrorists, the same people who blew this place to smithereens. Ok, so Unionists and Loyalists didn’t do many things right either, such as we should have met the demands of the Catholic community during the civil rights period much more quickly, but of course a person who slowed that down and prevented it was Paisley who protested adamantly against it. So it was an easy job for him to stimulate all the old worries and fears within Unionism. The DUP has given a voice to all the fears and insecurities of Unionism, and when you are trying to do a deal with Sinn Fein, who have destroyed this region quite literally, it is easy for the UUP to look like it is selling out. Gerry Adams helped fan the flames to by declaring that the deal was just a step towards a united Ireland, which only helped to confirm those fears. The UUP has been under siege like this since the 1960s, from outside Unionism as well as from within.

Unionism has, and with good cause, always felt itself under threat. I would say what needs to happen with the UUP is that it needs to make Unionism more acceptable to a wider range of people, and also to adopt the stance that if we are going towards a united Ireland, we make sure it is a better a safe united Ireland…but that, a united Ireland, isn’t even a prospect right now. I think that David Trimble did the right thing because the only way to get out of this thing is get peace and then demand that the IRA move away from violence.

The ordinary mid class Unionist simply cannot understand how you can have these people (IRA terrorists) in government. This is based in the deep suspicion and distrust which makes up the siege mentality. In order to change this, you need radical solutions but those are extremely difficult.

We went through all those years of bombings, shootings and killings, and most people on the outside think, “Well, there has got to be something better.” The problem is that you have to make compromises with those people who committed that very violence, and they have an agenda which was an undemocratic agenda. Now, they have more or
less accepted the principle of consent so that the people of Northern Ireland have to agree on a united Ireland.

AC: Can the idea of a maintained Union with Britain be sold to a portion of the Nationalist community?

RG: I think it absolutely can, and has been because not all Catholics are Nationalists. I think the realization is that a united Ireland as an ideal may be nice, but the logistics and realities of it might not stand up to those ideals. The British welfare state has some real benefits to it. Also, I don’t think Catholics and Protestants are all that different from one another, and even Irish and British are not all that dissimilar. You look at our values, the structure of our governments and churches, and they aren’t that far apart. So I think people can be made to feel comfortable being Irish within a British state.

Now, if Unionism can show that it is not anti-Catholic, and quite open to this other community, I think it will gain support. But that is hard to do with people like Paisley around stirring up trouble and suspicious. This sectarianism is almost like one-upmanship, it’s the “we are better” mentality on both sides which makes closing or narrowing the divide difficult.

AC: What are your reactions to the recent meeting between the DUP and the British-Irish Parliamentary body?

RG: I think it is an effort on the part of the DUP to prepare the ground for a move away from its hard-line stance. If they are going to make that move, they have to prepare, and get the ground ready so to speak. So, I think it is a positive think, because it indicates that the DUP wants to make a deal. The dilemma is that he has to damage his hard-line position while at the same time claiming he has won some victory over the Shinners which is very difficult, as the UUP well knows. Paisley is now in the position where he can avoid making any real decisions, so he is preparing the ground but holding back on real decisions. So it is a game being played and the question is whether he can get away with it.

I still believe that Paisley would truly like to be First Minister, but the only way he can do that is by cutting a deal. He has always taken what I think is the easy path in being the opposition, wiping up fears, but I think he wants to go down as a man who really did something.

AC: Do you believe that Unionism has a difficult time presenting a united, understandable and acceptable ideology to those outside its constituency? Why is this the case?

RG: I absolutely agree. But I don’t think it should be this difficult as there are clear benefits to being a Unionist. You cannot sell Unionism on an anti-Sinn Fein or anti-Agreement basis. We need to sell the union, and the reason why that sort of federalized unity makes good sense. I think the selling point is that even within Nationalism and some Republican circles, they see Northern Ireland as its own individual region whether part of a united Ireland or Britain.
The fight on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland is self-perpetuating, because while there are important issues like policing to deal with, they are not really crucial only made to be so. There is radical change going on within Northern Ireland, and as the legitimate concerns of Nationalism are addressed within the British system, I think that can become a selling point for the union.

There has always been an inward looking, backward, reactionary insecure element in Unionism which refuses to change. But there is also a very inclusive and accommodating element as well, and it is about fostering the growth of that element which is important.

AC: What are your feelings on the PUP in terms of its ideology, membership and tactics as a Unionist party?

RG: The PUP is somewhat modeled on the Northern Ireland Labor Party which at one time was quite strong and did quite well, but lost out over mostly silly things and the constitutional issue. The PUP is encumbered by its relationship with the UVF, but the UVF at one stage played a very important role in opening up to Nationalists and Republicans in terms of electoral policies which bridge the sectarian divide. These are found in slightly left of center labor and social policies which resonate to people in certain situations regardless of position on the constitutional issue. A problem is that they are also working to represent the Unionist position as well which turns of a large sector of working class support they might otherwise have if the constitutional question did not exist.

The PUP is trying to bring people along but have been demonized by Unionists for not only their paramilitary connections, but also their socialist policies. The PUP represents working class areas that are often demoralized, lacking confidence and many services like education and health, so I agree with what they are try to do.

The PUP is trying to lead the UVF into politics and they are doing some very positive work in this regard, especially trying to involve young people in leadership roles, enhancing education and developing interest in culture. However, coming from where they are coming from, people don’t trust them and that gives them all sorts of difficulty. In my mind, they are very admirable people who come from tough backgrounds and a wide variety of experiences. They are all radical thinkers who want to make a change, and changes they really believe are for the betterment of the people.

There has always been the left wing element to the PUP, but they are Unionist. I think right wing voters within the UVF vote for the DUP not because they support the DUP’s stance on paramilitaries, especially within Loyalism, but because they do not support the left wing agenda of the UVF.

For me, if the PUP wants to be successful, it needs to go all out and completely for a radical working class agenda which reaches across the board to the Catholic community. They have a difficulty doing this because some of those associated with them in the UVF would not support such a move.

AC: I am particularly interested in the PUP’s attempts to help the UVF move from violence to politics, and the party being born as a direct result of this sort of movement.
RG: I think a lot of that came from a very radical rejection of the Unionist hierarchy. I think Gusty Spence and others are being realistic in trying to identify with those who are very much part and parcel of the community which they represent, but this requires being quite radical in ideology and approach at times. The problem in this society is that there used to be just two political camps, Nationalist and Unionist, but now there is quite a lot of fracturing which has gone on. In Unionism especially, larger political parties like the UUP and DUP try and shoulder out smaller parties by any means because they take votes away from them. This is not only logistically difficult for a political party to be under attack from larger parties, but it is also demoralizing because you are being criticized by “your own.” This leads a lot of smaller parties to focus on community work, and work on the ground where they can stay under the radar of the larger parties and feel more productive.

The future of the PUP is not exactly bright at the moment. I think they have two options. One, they could pack it in, and join the UUP and actually have a big influence in the UUP because the voters they would bring with them would warrant that. But then, if they did that, they would be working with middle class people who probably will not agree with the party’s position on working class politics. Still, I think they could have a big influence because people like David Ervine, Billy Hutchinson and Dawn Purvis are quite charismatic and influential, but also the voters they would bring would be very valuable to the UUP…that might be the most constructive and hopeful way. Right now they are losing out badly because they don’t control the UVF, but anytime the UVF does something, they get associated with it and held responsible for it. To move into the mainstream, they would have to break with the UVF, but doing that losses them a portion of their current support base, so it is a Catch-22.

Unionists sometimes find it difficult to reach out beyond their communities and social circles and sell themselves to different groups and people…this is true not only with Nationalists but also within Unionism as well. The thing is that Unionists all have some very obvious level of commonality between them, which does not exist between them and the Nationalist community. However, where Unionists divide from one another are areas which they often have in common with various parts of the Nationalist community.

I think a lot of the Loyalist connection with violence can be attributed to the fact that they were in fear, a very different sort of fear than most middle class Unionists. They feared for their lives and their identity in a way that I think many more mainstream Unionists never had to experience. This fear has been passed on and perpetuated for a variety of reasons and to a variety of degrees.

Unionist have won, and been quite successful but they don’t know it or can’t see it, and almost the reverse can be said of the Republicans. In fact, groups like the PUP did some of the best work in selling the idea to Loyalists that they had won with the Good Friday Agreement.

-Interview with Christopher Stalford, Belfast city councilor for the DUP on April 29th, 2006:
Alec Chiquoine (AC): The first question I have for you then if how you came to be involved with the DUP? Maybe you could give me a little bit of your background and how that influenced you becoming involved in the party.

Christopher Stalford (CS): My family would have actually been very much an Ulster Unionist family right up till recently. At the time of the referendum I was 16 and I thought the leadership of the DUP was enunciating the right message about the Agreement. They warned that terrorist prisoners were going to be released and that Sinn Fein would be placed into the heart of our government without decommissioning. I think that judgment has been vindicated. So it was through the leadership that the DUP provided at the time of the referendum I came to be involved in politics. From that I progressed to join the party and I was an active member canvassing at election times and when I went to Queen’s University I was chairman of the DUP association at Queen’s. At that time, I gained employment with Peter Weir, the DUP assembly member for North Down. From there I went on to work as an assistant Jim Allister the DUP MP. I was elected to the Belfast City Council last May.

AC: Of the Unionist parties which exist, what is it about the DUP that drew you to it as opposed to another party? Was there anything outside the party stance on the referendum issue?

CS: Well, I think there was a feeling amongst a lot of people that certainly David Trimble’s word was not worth anything...what he said one day could be reversed the next day. I felt that the DUP meant what they said and would stick to their word, and that is a thing that drew a lot of people to the party. I think it would be unfair not to say that charismatic leadership of our leader, Dr. Paisley, also drew me to the party. Various key figures are major assets to the party in attracting new members and voters.

AC: What distinction, if any, do you make between Unionist and Loyalists?

CS: Unionists believe in the rule of law and believe in non-violent political methods. I don’t like the use of the word Loyalist to describe paramilitaries because I think that demeans the word Loyalist. Loyalists are loyal to the Queen and they are loyal to the United Kingdom and as such abide by the rule of law and respect the rule of law. People that have taken the word Loyalist to describe themselves are not necessarily loyal to anything other than...some of them I think it is a question of lining their pocket with ill gotten gains from crime. I think the main distinction that can be draw between parties like the DUP and the Ulster Unionists on one hand and the PUP and UPRG on the other is that mainstream Unionists believe in the rule of law and that the police, the army, and the institutions of the state are the sole arbiters of law and order, the sole route by which justice can be dispensed.

AC: Why is it that the Belfast City Council has continued to run while the National Assembly is currently suspended due to political deadlock, even though the make up of these two bodies, in terms of political parties, is the same?
CS: The functions of local government run regardless of whether there is a National Assembly up and running or not. I suppose in that case it is fair to say that it is unlikely it will ever collapse…local government will never collapse so parties have to make it work. I think what we see in Belfast is the DUP has forged relationships with parties other than Sinn Fein on the Nationalist side, I am talking about the SDLP. Last year the SDLP supported us over Sinn Fein in the position of Lord Mayor of the city, and I think those gestures will be reciprocated in the future and I think that Unionists are prepared to form a working relationship with Nationalists who don’t reserve the right to murder them for their political views. I think that we have seen a very constructive relationship built up between the DUP and the SDLP in City Hall. It is a pity that the constructive relationship we have with the SDLP in the City Hall and the pragmatic approach the SDLP councilors in Belfast are prepared to take its not mirrored by their party leadership who are absolutely insisting there will be no change in the Belfast Agreement even thought that Agreement has been rejected by the Unionist electorate.

AC: There has been a significant body of research that has shown that Protestants in general, since the implementation process of the Belfast Agreement, have been very unsatisfied with the results. What do you think needs to be changed about the Agreement and its implementation so that the Unionist feel that is more representative of their wishes?

CS: Well, there is a fundamental problem with the Belfast Agreement in that it forces parties into coalition, parties that might otherwise choose not to be in coalition. I don’t think that any one party, least of all my own, has a God given right to be in the government of a country. Forcing parties to work together when they don’t necessarily want to, when they are pointing in different directions, when they have completely different positions not only on the constitutional question but on social questions and policy areas, forcing those parties to work together I do not believe is a good form of government. I also don’t think that the situation that we have presently where government ministers are essentially dictators within their own departments, where they can go off and make whatever decisions they like, and even if the assembly passes a motion against whatever decision the minister has made, the decision still stands, is a good one. So I think ministerial accountability is one of the issues we need to see. We can’t have Martin Magunniess simply going off and abolishing academic selection even though the majority of the members of the Northern Ireland Assembly are in favor of academic selection. If we are going to have a coalition government, we can not have a situation where by government ministers are allowed to go off and do whatever they want and not be held accountable to the assembly.

Other changes that I think we need to see…we need to see more accountability in North-South cooperation. The DUP is in favor of North-South cooperation where it is to the benefit of the people of Northern Ireland not the people of the Republic. For instance, bird flu will not stop at the boarder and so it makes sense to cooperate on issue like that. Where we don’t agree with North-South institutions being set up is where those institutions are politically inspired without bringing any benefit to the people of Northern Ireland. We want to see accountability on North-South. If the people of Northern
Ireland, through their elected representatives support North-South cooperation, but if they do not it will not.

We also need to see, aside from the Agreement, a commitment from the Provisional movement that they will buy into policing. It is entirely unacceptable to have someone exercising government authority when they refuse to support the police. We cannot have a situation where by government ministers refuse to tell... you know when Robert McCartney was murdered Sinn Fein refused, despite the horrific way in which that man died, Sinn Fein refused to tell their constituents to give the police any information. There were 200 people in the bar the night he was murdered and by some strange coincidence no one happened to see anything. We cannot have a situation where a political party is holding back the implementation of justice in our country and that is what we have had up until now. So we need to have a complete commitment by Sinn Fein that they will buy into policing, support the police, they will encourage young Catholics to join the police and that those young recruits will not feel like they are putting their families at risk as has been the case up until now.

**AC:** Along those lines, I am aware of the DUP’s position on Sinn Fein and their involvement in the governance of Northern Ireland given their involvement with paramilitaries and that this is extended to Unionist parties with such ties as well, how do you deal with the fact that these groups are democratically elected and thus representative of a portion of the population?

**CS:** First thing I would say is that the Ulster Unionist Party and the DUP aren’t in any way linked to paramilitary organizations and given a choice the Unionist electorate has never voted for people who are linked to paramilitary organizations or political parties that have paramilitary links. In the mid 1990s we saw a bit of support built up towards the PUP and UDP but that has now melted like snow off a ditch. You know it never ceases to amaze me in areas where supposedly paramilitary groups are really, really strong and supposedly where they speak for all the people they get tanked gobed at election time in those areas because ordinary decent people don’t vote for them. Now I don’t know what’s wrong with the Nationalist community that they seem to have a collective blind spot in terms of Sinn Fein’s involvement in criminality and Sinn Fein’s continued involvement in paramilitaries. Perhaps its reflective of the failure of the SDLP on the ground to work for their constituents and that’s why people have gone to Sinn Fein on the Nationalist side but certainly I’m of the view that a majority of Unionists that no mandate, no amount of votes can ever legitimize the use of violence for political aims. You know are we going to say that because Hitler had a mandate that validated everything that the Nazis did? Of course no one would say that. Similarly I don’t think anyone can say that no matter how many votes that SF gets, even if they get 95% of the vote, as long as they continued to reserve the right to kill me for my political opinions then I don’t think there’s any place for them in the government of Northern Ireland and I don’t think they will become, until violence is completely renounced and the IRA is completely decommissioned and completely disappears from the scene I don’t think they will be a political party in the conventional sense. I don’t think people will treat them as one.
AC: It seems to that a number of divides within Unionism are centered along socio-economic lines and that this leads to a sense of exclusion and inadequacy within some groups, especially the working class. In your experience, is this something that needs to be addressed and also what is the DUP doing to reach out to a wide range of Unionist voters?

CS: I don’t buy into the argument…I mean, that argument is one which is put forward in an attempt to justify the emergence and existence of paramilitary organizations. It is an argument enunciated by those who would try and apply some sort of pseudo-socialist argument about why they took up guns and why they started murdering people. I come from a working class background and my family is working class, but we would go out and regularly vote at election time and we never felt disillusioned from the Unionist parties. My parents always voted Ulster Unionist Party up until recently and they cast their votes for that party because they felt it best represented their interests. They now thankfully cast their vote for the DUP but…I don’t buy into the argument that disillusionment with the political parties lead to the formation of paramilitary groups. I don’t accept that at all.

I do think that as a party we have broadened our base. I think that when the DUP first emerged in the early ‘70s, it was very much a working class party and you wouldn’t have had an enormous level of support from middle class Unionist voters in places like North Down. But then by the same token, Ian Paisley would not have been able to win every European election poll he ran in without significant middle class support in those elections. So, I think it is hard to quantify, but certainly now the party has a much broader base of people voting for it than it ever has…you know, two Assembly members in North Down the biggest party in the local council there in a constituency where ten years ago we had two councilors and no Assembly members. I think this support is because we have broadened our appeal without diluting our principles.

AC: Besides the constitutional issue which often overshadows, especially in the media, other political issues, what other policies on the city and national level are the DUP try to address?

CS: Prior to the Westminster election, the DUP probably published about 30 different policy papers on issues ranging from supporting and developing business, water rates, health, education, and securing better deals for pensioners. So, I think it is through publishing papers like those that you address individual constituencies within society, their concerns, what they want to see from political parties. I also think that it would be churlish to say that the party has not changed how it presents itself. We have a much wider range of people now who are featured on television representing our views like Peter Robinson, Nigel Dodds and Gregory Campbell. I also think the appearance of people like Peter Weir and Jeffery Donaldson moving into our party as sent out a message to people who have previously been very Ulster Unionist that the DUP is actually there natural home. I know it wasn’t till Jeffery moved that my family started moving to the DUP. I think it sends a message to what you could call middle Ulster, that the DUP really is their natural home.
AC: This is a bit of a change in subject so I apologize. Some people have made the claim that so called Loyalist “extremists” and political parties are more willing to seek accommodation and cooperation with Republicans than mainstream Unionists. They continue to argue that this is a more productive way to go about the peace process. What is your response to those claims?

CS: It is very easy for one bunch of hoots to talk to another bunch of hoots. As far as ordinary mainstream Unionists are considered, it is morally repellent to be sitting down and talking to these people at a time when they maintain their arms and reserve the right to use violence. Having said that, we have set down a number of conditions such as complete decommissioning, the ending of all criminality and intelligence gathering, and when those conditions are met we will be true to our word and we will follow through and enter into meaningful dialogue. However, it will not be a day before those conditions are met. Unionism got itself into a terrible mess in the mid-1990s under Trimble’s era because Trimble had no bottom line. I think what we have seen is that the progress on decommissioning has come about as a result of the fact that Sinn Fein knew they were dealing with Unionists who will not dilute their bottom line. If we say we will not be going into government until decommissioning is completed, that is the position, plain and simple. I understand that David Ervine, Gusty Spence, and people like that are very big on this former combatants coming together to try and find away forward. The problem with them is that their brand of politics has been completely rejected by the Unionist electorate at election after election. Ervine limped home in the Belfast City Council and be under pressure in terms of holding his Assembly seat. So no I don’t accept the argument that the best people to advance the cause of Unionism are the people who have done the most over the last 35 years to demean it through terrorism and criminal activity.

AC: The DUP as quite often been referred to, and has even referred to itself, as an opposition party. Now that the DUP is the largest party in Northern Ireland politics, how do you think that is changing policy and stances within the party? Are the tactics or messages changing at all now that you are no longer the minority and very much the majority?

CS: I won’t say that we are an opposition party. If you look at the areas we are currently in political control of, I think where the DUP are given the chance in terms of being a governing party people are happy to live under a DUP administration. Similarly I think there are a lot of people in the DUP who want devolution up and running, who want our ministers in there leading decisions because we have confidence in them and believe they would make great ministers. Ian Paisley would be an excellent first minister and I think there are other members of the party who would do a great job as well. But once again I think we are being held back from that by the refusal of Republicans to put violence behind them. When we do see that happening, I am very confident that our ministers, having in the last executive had our ministers be the mostly highly praised for their work, I have every confidence that whoever our ministers are, similar praise will be coming in their direction.
AC: Why do you believe that, even given all that has happened in Northern Ireland especially since the early 1990s, do you believe paramilitary organizations still are involved in violence?

CS: Paramilitary organizations continue to exist because it is a very profitable business for the people who are members of them. I think the days of these organizations representing any political ideology or signing up to any particular cause are gone. I think these organizations now are effectively organized crime syndicates and they have evolved into that because of the policies of the British government which allowed their continued existence and allowed them to continue in their criminality. I think that is the main reason that paramilitary organizations continue to blight our society. Particularly on the Loyalist side, businesses are being bleed dry paying protection money, companies are being forced out of business for what? It is not for any Loyalism or any Unionism, its for lining the pockets of people who are doing it. It is so on the Republican side where we have seen recent actions by North and South policing bodies, which is one area where I welcome North-South cooperation as we obviously welcome action against organized crime, and they intercepted a fuel smuggling operation of the Provisional IRA in South Armagh. It is ridiculous that Gallagher’s cigarette company go from Belfast to Britain and through Britain to get to Dublin because they are afraid that if they cross the border in Northern Ireland and have the cigarettes stolen. So I think it is clear that these organizations have evolved perhaps from political or ideological origins into organized crime.

AC: And what do you think can be done to combat that?

CS: Tough policing is what is called for. The capacity of police to deal with crime like that has been diminished as a result of the Patten Report which slashed police numbers. We need more intelligence gathering by the police, we need closer cooperation between the police and the Garda in the South to act against these people because it can’t only involve internal action because they can jump over the border. Dublin needs to get tough on this as well because for to long has a blind eye been turned by the South to the criminal activities of the IRA. So, I think the primary way this can be dealt with is through tough policing measures.

AC: I have heard people suggest that in addition to tough policing employment campaigns could help to alleviate the problem.

CS: I can tell you now that the money that has been thrown at Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries is obscene. The government has tried to buy these people off and it clearly hasn’t worked. I have constituents who are struggling to get by on 80 pounds a week and these paramilitaries aren’t struggling to get by on 80 pounds a week. I am absolutely opposed to any suggestion that the government should be throwing money at paramilitary organizations…that is a buy off and once you get into that area of paying them, you just keep paying them and they always come back for more. No, I think what is called for is tough policing responses. The high unemployment there is in places like the Shankill and the Falls comes about as a result of the existence of these paramilitaries organizations.
who have destroyed their own communities, destroyed the infrastructure and continue to do so. They are a parasite on the back of their communities. The best thing that could happen for working class inner city people on both sides is if paramilitaries go out of existence.

AC: Is there anything you feel I haven’t covered in this interview, or a subject I haven’t touched upon which is particularly important in my understanding the DUP and/or Northern Ireland?

CS: I think one thing that cannot be underestimated in all of this is the role of United States in all of this. I think especially since George Bush was elected that the US administration has been a force for good and the peace process here. I think what we would like to see is that, because Sinn Fein is very responsive to pressure from the United States, pressure applied because we are nearly there in terms of decommissioning and that the pressure needs to be applied upon the Republican movement to get them to the point where by all violence is put aside. In a post 9/11 there is much less tolerance within America towards terrorist organizations, particularly the IRA which for years was sort of romanticized by the American public and even glorified. I think pressure can be brought to bear by the US administration on Sinn Fein which will be significant in getting a stable devolution up and running.

I think the DUP might be making moves towards establishing lobbying offices in the United States which is something I have been very big on. Unionism needs to start selling itself abroad. I think if people truly understood the nature of the Northern Ireland conflict they would be much less sympathetic to the type of ideology Sinn Fein espouses.

-Interview with Chris Hudson on Tuesday, May 2nd 2006:

-Alec Chiquoine (AC): Especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s when Loyalist paramilitary violence, and violence in general, was escalating to new highs, how and why did you decide to stay in contact with the UVF when many others were turning away?

Chris Hudson (CH): I did so because they had said to me during our discussions that if we worked hard together there could be the big prize, and the big prize was peace. And indeed in the early 1990s at one stage, I thought it came very close to them calling a ceasefire before even before the IRA. To this day, I don’t know what went wrong, and likely it was a combination of things. Still what was significant was that they had come down to Dublin and said to me that they could deliver a ceasefire.

The other thing was that difficult for me was the sectarian killing at the time, and the sheer senselessness with which they were targeting Catholics. I talked to David Ervine and I said, “This doesn’t make any sense.” I went on the radio and said about the UVF, “Well, it seems that they are speaking with honeyed words when they can say one thing and go out a commit a barbaric act like this at the same time.” I said this wondering whether they would still want to talk to me afterwards, and they did, but we continued to have serious disagreements. However, they said they still wanted to pursue the peace
process. So I was challenging the UVF by sticking to my principles while still working with them.

There were difficult moments, but I was continually told that if we stayed with this (they needed me as their contact to Dublin) and if we all worked a little hard, we could bring peace about. I think in a lot of violent campaigns you see them escalate before they deescalate and finish. To some extend, I think people could argue that this is them getting their retaliation in, but I also believe it is so they can say they ended on a note and display of strength. Still, it was hard because I new innocent people where going to be murdered through this.

I stayed with it because even though I was sitting with people whose associates were out murdering innocent people, it was about the end game. I had committed myself and I had to stay with it.

AC: What is your impression of the UVF’s presentation to the community and its interaction with other groups?

CH: Paramilitaries are complicated because they often splinter and create factions within themselves. They would describe themselves as an army, but that is not really the reality in terms of cohesion.

It is hard to see precisely how they connect with their communities but with Loyalists and the UVF, they definitely connect with their communities. They are not a terrorist organization…they are as much part of Loyalist communities as the PIRA are of their respective areas. But this connection is not as clear within the greater Unionist community. Within greater Unionism, there was always an uneasy sense about paramilitaries and a support for the security forces. In the more working class areas, those on the margins, would see the paramilitaries as their people and acting on their behave. They might not have immediately or directly agreed with them, but saw them as necessary in getting their retaliation in against Republicans.

Ironically, when it comes to the political side, the community won’t vote for the paramilitaries. In many ways this is because of the paramilitary experience as it prevents them from extending political ties into the great Unionist community because they will not be accepted. This is even though David Ervine is probably one of the most articulate and visionary politicians in Northern Ireland and actually has a view on how to get out of this conflict. However, that doesn’t hold sway with the general Unionist community because of their paramilitary connection.

--Story about “respectable” families seeing the UVF guys as protectors in certain situations and connections to them.

In private, and certain circumstances, many Unionists do have regard and respect for the UVF, but of course this can never and will never be admitted publicly. Of course, even the UVF volunteers don’t necessarily vote for or support the PUP.

AC: Why is it that the UVF will at best only partially support the PUP in politics?

CH: I think it is because Loyalist paramilitaries, unlike Republican paramilitaries, didn’t see it was their business necessarily to have a political position. Their job was as a military organization to protect Ulster against terrorists and to take the fight to them.
The only political view they would have is that if the union was under attack from Republicanism or the Dublin government, they will take the fight to that base. They are not politically ideological like Sinn Fein is quasi Marxists. Loyalists are not advancing a revolution, they are protection their position as they see it within the United Kingdom and ironically British identity and the British way of life. I would challenge them on this front because their definition of what to be British is very narrow.

The only other consistent and wide held goal is the defeat of Republican terrorism, again, which is not particularly political in and of itself.

Of course the flip side of this is that when it came time to discussing and coming up with ways to get out of the conflict, the UVF and its members proved very capable of coming up with new, practical and creative ways, and showed they were quite good at the negotiation and political side of things as well. In the later years, their development in this area, not so much politics, but moving things forward…conflict resolution and transformation if you will, was really quite impressive and surprising.

AC: Do you worry about a return to open violence and if so, what could trigger this?

CH: Yes, I think a return could be precipitated by any attempt to impose joint authority by the British and Irish governments we could see a return to violence. It may not be on the same level has we have seen in the past, but almost certainly we would see a drastic rise in violent undertakings. But I don’t think this sort of joint authority is likely to happen at all. The logistics of it are too complicated and not really in the interest of the Republic of Ireland at the moment.

That would be the only situation I can really think of that would cause that sort of return, so I think that is something to be optimistic about, because I don’t think it will happen. Loyalist paramilitaries will not return to violence for any other reasons. Gangsterism will still exist, and issues/disputes over territorial control are likely to continue, but I don’t think they will get out of control. They know that if they allow their violence to significantly increase in any way they will be dealt with harshly by the security forces. The IRA being in the process of standing down and certainly having for the most part ended its violent campaign against Unionists means that the UVF will not return to violence simply in the causeless vacuum which is created. USA intolerance of any terrorist activity plays a big party is deterring the return to violence by any side as well. In a post 9/11 world, I think all the paramilitaries realize that the willingness to tolerate violence has mostly disappeared in the American and British mindsets.

So, I don’t think you will see any major return to violence by any group, and definitely not the UVF. Northern Ireland has seen the benefits of being conflict and violence free, especially for economic development over the last ten years, and everyone is aware that a return to violence would damage this tremendously. The greater Unionist and Nationalist communities are not going to allow paramilitaries to dictate what goes on in Northern Ireland anymore. The UVF is very aware that unless very specific circumstances were to arise, there would be no support from their communities for a return to violence. The paramilitaries are trying to show that they are still around and won’t be pushed around, but even that is disappearing and changing in appearance and strategy as it does so. That is my understanding of where the UVF is going from my conversations with them.
AC: Why, given all that has happened in Northern Ireland over the last 15 years, does violence and criminality still exist in paramilitary form/activity?

CH: I can only speculate on this but security consultants might give you better insight. What I would guess is that certain people who want to make a name for themselves attach themselves to these organizations. People found that they can make money through the paramilitary structure, not unlike politics, where people go in with the best intentions to do good and create change but they find they can get a lot of money and people start asking for favors. The unfortunate part is that people through this process have come to realize that they can abuse their power through criminality while calling it something else under the paramilitary guise. However, I would emphasis that corruption and criminality is not something solely connected with the paramilitaries, it happens almost everywhere, including places like the UN.

The danger is that this activity gets a grip on certain communities and it becomes a part of the community operation. This leads to thinks like the mafia and such which is certainly a cause for concern. The Official IRA actually warned the UVF about this. They said that when the war is winding down, you have to bring your organization to an end…do it and do it quickly. All paramilitary organizations will end up corrupt because it is the next step in the progression of the beast.

So I don’t think the UVF is an organized crime syndicate, although certain elements are involved in crime and if they aren’t careful, they stand to become further involved and entrenched in that sphere.

I think part of it is that the paramilitaries are able, and have the capabilities to do things like criminal activity. So, I would even be in favor of the police dealing with them a little more harshly then they do in order to send a message from the community and the government.

AC: In your opinion, could the Loyalists have achieved more or less and the paramilitaries ever become active?

CH: Yes and no. You see in a way it is a chicken and the egg situation. The Loyalists political organizations grew out of the paramilitary experience, especially with ex-combatants questioning what it was they were doing and why they were doing it, and starting to put a political framework on what they were doing in a military sense. It strikes me that they would not have been able to achieve what they have because they would never have existed had it not been for the paramilitaries.

The only place politically I could see the paramilitaries having gone alternatively is to the Northern Ireland Labor Party. However, that party fell apart because when the Troubles came along, it forced people to choose a side on the constitutional issue and that split the party asunder. So anything in regards to whether the Loyalists could have found a political voice without the paramilitaries is highly speculative.

When the violence went on and on and on that is when the political framework for Loyalist paramilitaries began to develop. The paramilitary experience is what created the political realm for them.
AC: What particular views on violence were held by the UVF in terms of whether it was the right thing to do, and how it should be employed?

CH: Well, I never discussed this with them in terms of specifics, maybe on a more general moral level, but never about specific operations. However I was able to glean a few things. Many of their murders were considered to be purely sectarian and that was not how the UVF felt in most cases. Their intent was not to encourage sectarian random murder campaigns. Also, they observed and began to mimic Republican violence and explanations, especially in terms of defining legitimate targets. The UVF saw the PIRA definition of legitimate target as encompassing pretty much the entire Protestant community and then responded in similar ways.

There was a limited acceptance of the fact that many murders and operations were undertaken on completely sectarian grounds by the Loyalist paramilitaries which never really occurred with the Republicans which I think does show a certain realism on the part of Loyalism in identifying that at heart, the conflict in Northern Ireland was a sectarian battle at many points, and not some high flying battle of political ideals and their role in it. As we move away from the Troubles I think we find a lot of people trying to glamorize their role within it, but that has been largely absent on the part of the UVF. Glamorization dehumanizes the tragic loss of innocent life which should be the focus of looking back at this time in history, so I think in a bizarre way, by being very open and frank about what they did the UVF is helping to do because they are not participating in the glamorization.

AC: Many mainstream Unionists refuse to work politically with paramilitary groups as they see it as sanctioning paramilitary groups.

CH: Well I actually think they are right in doing that. My involvement in this is has been much different because I am a churchman and negotiator, not a politician. This isn’t to say paramilitaries should be written off and out completely by politics, they need to know what is going on and why, but there is a time at which it is completely legitimate to turn the light on the UVF and say, “OK guys, the war is over and it is time you packed your bags and leave as a paramilitary organization, it’s over to politics now.” The DUP and UUP also cannot be seen to tolerate in their own communities what they criticize in other’s like the Republicans.

Having said all that, I think there have been times of ambiguity between the paramilitaries and Unionist politicians. Some Unionists have met with the paramilitaries and rightly so, because they are trying to get them to step down, not to ask their political viewpoints. It would be totally unacceptable for some political party to come in and try and use the connection with a Loyalist paramilitary group to force itself forward. However, that does not mean that politicians from all sects of Unionism cannot at a community level sit down with the paramilitaries and help them to stand down. I don’t buy their argument that the paramilitaries are nothing more than criminal organizations at this point so that being the reason for not meeting with them isn’t legitimate to me.

If the UVF wants to really enter the realm of politics, if its members want to do that, the best thing they could do is disband as completely and fully as possible, as quickly as possible. Beyond that, they owe it to the Unionist and Loyalist people to
disband. They have no right to operate anymore. At one time they could have argued they did have a legitimate reason in community defense for existing, which can be argued, but is certainly more legitimate than any reason they may have now for their existence. At this point, the paramilitaries do not have a role to play…their only role is to get off the stage and let politics take over completely…this they owe to the people. They have an obligation now to support legitimate politics in one of the variety of political parties and also subscribe to law and order, which represents all the people of Northern Ireland, and support it.

They need to see that they are in a changed world and work quickly to catch up to that change. Many people see what they did with the ceasefire and peace process and are quite impressed.

-----Explanation about ceasefire and internal violence with the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) is that they cannot leave without dealing with this “problem”

The UVF’s logic in this regard isn’t my logic, nor is it probably many people’s, but it does still exist and is very legitimate for those who hold it so you have to talk around it and about it.

The DUP and UUP are right to demand that those involved in the governance of Northern Ireland break off ties with paramilitary organizations, whatever side they may be on, even if they are a little ambiguous about how to approach this.

AC: Would you say that the communities that the paramilitaries perceived themselves to be defending throughout the Troubles feel that the current Unionist Parties do an adequate job of representing them politically?

CH: People vote for who they vote for. If you look at now, even on the Shankill Road the DUP is getting elected, where years ago I would never have believed such a thing could happen. It is a little shocking to me to see this move politically, because I would have seen that community as one which would have been more likely to go for the PUP or a progressive UUP candidate like Chris McGimpsey. It may be that the people there do not want to be associated with paramilitarism any more, so therefore they might ambiguously support a paramilitary organization at the ground level but are unwilling to vote for organizations and parties associated with them.

People in Loyalist areas might also be looking at the work done by people like Peter Robinson in East Belfast, which are now quite prosperous and making major strides, and be thinking, “Well maybe they will do the same for us.” There is no doubt that Loyalist areas have suffered from a variety of social ills. I think that the British government may also be trying to maneuver the DUP into governance with Sinn Fein by allowing money to go into Loyalist working class areas through the party, which boosts their support. At the same time though, I am sure David Ervine is in there trying to get this funding for people as well.

So, I won’t say people are not represented by the main Unionist parties, however the Loyalist paramilitaries might give you another picture and say there are seriously neglected areas, areas that have been left behind and are becoming the new proletariat and marginalized community. They would tell you that Unionist politicians don’t care about them, but that remains to be seen. The biggest thing I think is the fact that in many
Loyalists areas, people don’t even bother to vote, so it is hard to get a read on their feelings in terms of political representation.

It is complex because you have everyone doing better with the peaceful situation we have now, but then you have Loyalist working class areas that are not doing well on a number of social levels. These tend to be where the paramilitaries are the strongest at the moment. But his sort of neglect of certain areas is no different than in major cities all around the world. The danger is that these areas become “no hopers” where politicians stay away because they figure why bother changing the minds of those who won’t even vote. The difficulty is trying to come up with ways to deal with these areas and cure them of some of the social ills which they face. On this front, I think politicians need to listen carefully to those Loyalists paramilitaries who truly want to be active in politics and community work, because they have an acute knowledge of what is going on in these communities. This goes for shutting down the paramilitaries as well. Members of those organizations who are looking to disband have the best inside knowledge and experience on how to do exactly that, so politicians should pay careful attention to what they are saying because that will be the best way to move things forward.

---The following are excerpts of talking with Chris Hudson about the compatibility of Unionism and Nationalism

**CH:** Although Republicans and Nationalists would deny it up and down, Nationalism is really about Catholic Irish homogeneity. So in that sense it is far more exclusive than I think the traditional sense of being British that Unionists hold. Of course, arguing the inclusive nature of being British and Unionist is damaged by the knee jerk and discriminatory reaction to the civil rights campaign. However, I still see British identity as more inclusive than the Irish Catholic one.

I think a major part of why the Troubles escalated like it did was that Catholics to an extent say the working class Protestants and not the middle and upper classes as the ones who were oppressing them and lashed out against them. I think working class Protestants were understandably taken aback by this onslaught and struck back in an equally harsh and sometimes indiscriminate manner.

One major problem is that especially within the working classes of Northern Ireland, there is no sense of a shared identity. When this shared identity begins to form, I think that will nullify the constitutional issue to a greater extend and really change the politics of Northern Ireland in terms of where the political divides lie.

**AC:** Was there a coherent strategy on the part of the UVF when you began working with them on how they would move from violence to politics, and to use a Gerry Adams phrase, balance between the ballot box and the armalite?

**CH:** The reason the UVF connected with me was to discuss precisely that. They had made the decision that something was happening within the Republican community that would lead to the IRA’s campaign being brought to a closure. They felt they too should be in such a process but weren’t at that point in time. In a way, my job was to help them create this process. It didn’t have a strategic goal as such, other than to bring around a Loyalist ceasefire. But I like to think of myself as a strategic thinker, and I tried to
encourage them to do the same so that we could gently and steadily move forward through what was being said. What the UVF needed to know was that there were no secret deals between the Irish government, the British and the IRA, to be sure that they would not stand down only to be forced through back alley deals into a united Ireland.

The Loyalists did start becoming more strategic as we worked together. They are not just emotive, or responsive, but they put a lot of thought into things. They very carefully watch and listen to what is being said. However, I am a little disappointed and feel that we should be a lot further along. Here we are in the year 2006 with the IRA still giving the run about to the decommissioning commission and the Loyalists are still only just now starting to disband and stand down. It isn’t good enough for it being 12 years since the ceasefires and 8 from the Good Friday Agreement. I think everyone blew a great opportunity with the Good Friday Agreement, the support it had initially, and the great space of peace it created to allow politics to work in initially. But, we could be where the Palestinians and Israelis are, so it could be worse.

We need to be pushing hard on all the paramilitary groups to get them to pack up and go away and allow politics to take their place in Northern Ireland. We need organizations like the paramilitaries and the Orange Order to stop ratcheting up the ante all the time. If groups like the UVF don’t start addressing what they are becoming, which is increasingly criminal and a hate figure for the other community, it will only get harder. It is time they really began to deal with themselves seriously and find out what they are all about at this point…and deal with it intelligently, because they are not stupid people. So in away I wish everyone would get their act together and really start addressing what needs to happen to push the peace process in Northern Ireland fully, completely, and permanently into the realm of politics, and hopefully politics beyond the constitutional issue.

-Interview with Dawn Purvis of the PUP and policing board of Northern Ireland May 5th, 2006:

Alec Chiquoine (AC): The first question I have for you then is a little bit of background about yourself, I know some of what you have done thus far in Loyalism and Unionism and your experience here in Belfast but pretty much I have only read second hand sources. I’d like a little bit of an idea of your background, where you grew up and how that influenced where you are today in terms of politics.

Dawn Purvis (DP): The area where I grew up (Pakenham Street in south west Belfast) is the same area I live in today. It is a mainly working class loyalist area in south Belfast. I suppose we had…my up bring would be described as deprived. There wasn’t much money about but it was a very close-knit community. The Troubles started when I was about three so I have never know anything but the Troubles. The Troubles to me were being lifted out of bed at night because there was a bomb in the street, or the soldiers kicking down the door, carrying you out of the house and standing you against the wall because there was a bomb on the next street. Standing against the wall in the middle of the night with fenders and hubcaps and things lying in the street from the explosion in the next street. Barricades at the top of the street because there was vigilantly gangs that
were shooting down the street. All sorts of things, I could list you chapter and verse lots of different incidents like that.

But, in saying that, it probably sounds totally abnormal to somebody who never knew that conflict, but when you are growing up in conflict it seems totally normal. So, my involvement with the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and loyalist politics if you like, started around 1994 when I was involved in... I was a community activist in this area. The loyalist paramilitaries had called a ceasefire in October of 1994 and I was beginning to listen to the likes of David Ervine and Billy Hutchinson on TV talking about Northern Ireland, talking about the conflict, talking about peace, and what struck me about these men were: one, these men were former paramilitaries, secondly, they spoke about Northern Ireland in reality terms and what Northern Ireland really was. That was a can of worms because prior to that we had Unionist politicians who looked at Northern Ireland through rose colored lenses and said it was a wonderful place and if all the bad men would go away it would be even better. But where I lived it wasn’t a particularly nice place, and the bad men were not people who had parachuted in from outer space, so there was no way they were going to go away, they were part and parcel of the society which had created them. They were uncles, brothers, cousins, they were my friends’ fathers, my friends’ brothers, my friends’ husbands, and you know in my simplistic logical since I was a child since about ten years of age was that the people who were going to slow down the peace process in Northern Ireland are the men with the guns and until they sit down and sort out their problems and differences with one another, this conflict is going to go on. And I think in 1994 I seen a chink of light because the IRA had called a ceasefire, the loyalist paramilitaries had called a cease fire and I thought at last we are going to get the protagonists sitting down and talking with one another.

So I actually became quite interested then in the PUP at that time and was indeed head hunted if you like by a friend of mine who approached me and asked me to join. I didn’t want to join because of the association with the UVF, but he hounded me for weeks and gave me the manifesto and explained to me that the PUP gave political analysis to the UVF in terms of the constitutional position of Northern Ireland but that the UVF didn’t have a policy on housing, pro-choice, women’s rights you know. The PUP was really a stand alone political party with its own policies and manifesto which were very progressive and very radical in terms of Unionist politics. So I did join and became a founding member of the South Belfast PUP, and I think at that time really got swept away on the wave of what seemed to be a roll towards peace you know, and I think between... I know we had a few set backs in 1996 with the IRA breaking their ceasefire and the Canary Wharf bombing and stuff in February. But then we had the elections in May and then the talks started in June 1996 and I think at that stage I recognized that an agreement was achievable and people in the party could see there was a real dynamic here for change. So, I became actively involved in the PUP then and I’m still here.

AC: How has Loyalism attempted to establish itself as a mainstream Unionist political community and what is needed from groups like the PUP to achieve this and bolster political support?

DP: To answer the first part of your question, um, I would say for a number of years at least in my own experience, I felt that the mainstream Unionist political parties, the DUP
and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) were becoming increasingly disassociated with working class Loyalist communities. My home here in this street was bombed in 1992 by the IRA. My home was completely wrecked and I had a 17 month old son and an 8 week old son, and we had to move out for a year while the houses were being fixed up. I remember our MP at the time was an Ulster Unionist, and I remember asking him for all sorts of help in terms of compensation and everything else. Really he was ineffective, he seemed to be to me a government guy, you know, someone who really wouldn’t go against the grain and would go with anything for an easy life. I thought to myself, “These tired old men really do not represent what I need in my community.” You know, for a long time the DUP were thought of, this is the other Unionist political party the DUP, were thought of as really representative of the working class community but because of their fundamentalism and their views as well, this whole notion of them being tied up with religion, I would never be able to vote for them because I am avowedly pro-choice and you know just because… you can look for yourselves, the utterances of the DUP are somewhere where I wouldn’t go. So, I think increasingly people within my community felt as though they didn’t have a voice. The PUP to me happened along at an opportune moment.

How they are going to establish themselves in terms of mainstream politics, Unionist politics, still remains to be seen.

A break while Dawn was introduced to a new interface worker in the area who had come to pay her a visit.

The difficulty the PUP faced from day one was its association with the UVF and Red Hand Commando. There is a hierarchy in Unionist politics and always has been from the formation of the state where the Ulster Unionist represent the political elites and middle classes and sort of very much look down upon working class communities. And so, in terms of the conflict as well, if you look at the early days of the conflict, you’d see there were allegiances between paramilitaries, loyalist paramilitaries, and the Ulster Unionist Party and the DUP. But then as government policies of criminalization got underway in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s, the mainstream Unionist parties then started a separation and disassociation from the Loyalist paramilitaries. You have heard all the comments, I am sure, calling them scum bags and such.

AC: Yes, I’ve heard, I’ve had contact with Dr. Paisley and the DUP.

DP: It’s double speak, you know, it is total hypocrisy. At one time they were totally associated, they couldn’t get any closer in the bed beside them. But because that job of criminalization and demonization was so well done, that is the difficult and the PUP and the UDP if you like, faced in terms of the common establishment within mainstream Unionist politics, their association with Loyalist paramilitaries. And to me, for my part, the way I felt about it was, “You can’t cut off people and leave them behind.” The notion… I mean Trimble’s leadership was about, “Hack all these bad people into a boat and let’s watch them sailing off into the sunset.” That is never dealing with the issue, and the DUP came to adopt that position as well. For me, that was never, ever, going to deal with the issues. It was trying to make our society realize that the way to deal with the
issue was bringing people along with you and the PUP and the UDP were trying to do that; they were showing people a path to democracy, or a way out of the jungle if you like. So, that is the difficulty the PUP faces in terms of trying to establish itself in mainstream Unionism.

I think we sort of reached our peak around 1998 when we had been part of the talks, part of the Good Friday Agreement. We were seen, if you like, hand in hand with the Ulster Unionist party going into the talks in 1997 with Sinn Fein, and there was the Ulster Unionist Party with the PUP and UDP beside them. The DUP had walked out, Mr. Paisley and his party and walked out and Robert McCartney had walked out but here was a Unionist force if you like going in to face down Republicanism and get a good deal for Unionism. So we rode a crest of a wave at that time, we had done very well in elections, we were more accepted, generally we were accepted in Loyalist working class areas but we were becoming more acceptable in middle class areas. But then I think management of the political process with David Trimble at the helm suffered a lot. The only way I can describe it know is if you have the manager of a football team and the team are winning cups and medals and what have you…and are at the top their league then the manager is doing well. But when the team is perceived to be losing and not winning games and constantly at the bottom of the league, you get rid of the manager, so I think Unionist got rid of Trimble and have taken on Mr. Paisley as their new manager. In doing so, the PUP have been effected from that fall out because we have always been avowedly pro-Agreement. The Ulster Unionists were ambiguous about being pro-Agreement but we have always been avowedly pro-Agreement. So, there is that shift in Unionist politics. I don’t think it has totally moved away from the Agreement, I think the DUP just sell themselves a little bit better.

It is difficult for us to establish ourselves because, one, we are mainly working class, two, because we are associated with the UVF and Red Hand Commandos and three because of our pro-Agreement stance.

**AC:** What is your opinion on that fact that it seems many of the people and community members who may be part of the UVF or RHC, or support them, don’t vote for the PUP?

**DP:** Well, the UVF leadership does not tell their members that they have to vote in a particular way, they are free to vote for whom ever they wish. And it just goes to reflect that these members, the members of paramilitary organizations, are part and party of society. They are not people who parachuted down and are under the ultimate control of one arbitrator, or whatever you want to call it, who says you are going to do that, your are going to do that. They are part and parcel of society, they reflect and are representative of the community we live in, and it just so happens the community we live in at the minute has the DUP as a majority party, so members of the UVF and RHC support the DUP and its political analysis. However, the leadership of the UVF actually support the PUP and their political analysis.

**AC:** What role do you see violence having played in the Northern Ireland conflict and where it is currently? What role has politics played? Do you see any connection between these two different forces within Northern Ireland?
DP: (Long pause). That is a big question. (Long pause). I really don’t know. What role does violence play? Well some would argue that people have bombed and maimed their way to the negotiating table, and they would argue that on both sides because if you look at the increase in violence for both Republicans and Loyalists, but particularly Loyalists, prior to the ceasefires, they would argue that it was one last push to strengthen their hand and make it to the negotiating table. But when you look at the political settlement if you like which culminated in the Good Friday Agreement, it could have been settled years ago...years and years and years ago. I think it was uh, Mark Durkin or Seamus Mallon who called the it the Sunningdale Agreement for slow learners. And then when we were at Leads Castle the year before last, and the DUP actually came in for talks for the first time, one of my party colleagues coined the phrase, “Leads Castle was the Good Friday Agreement for slow learners.”

I think obviously people resort to violence when they believe they have no other option. But soldiers fight war to bring peace so, wars at some point have to end and peace has to be made. I think politics now has taken over where once there was violence. I think the whole conflict transformation process that began prior to 1994 because Loyalist and Republicans were talking prior to that and I believe that the whole conflict transformation process began long before the ceasefires were called. I think even if politics failed now in Northern Ireland, that the conflict transformation process would continue and that is in terms of dialogue between people with different ideologies. So, even in absence of violence that process will go on. But we need to show others, if you like dissidents and others, that politics can work and will work. And really its about everyone having their own place in the sun.

AC: Do you believe that without the violent aspect of the conflict in Northern Ireland occurring that the political process could have developed in such a way that it began to work on conflict transformation, or did violence force the political process along to more directly and realistically address the problems?

DP: I think politics were beginning to change in Northern Ireland. If you look at the rise of the Northern Ireland Labor Party in ‘64 and ‘65 and O’Neill’s reforms and changes that were coming out at that time, I mean the Ulster Unionist Party fought their tickets at that time on mainly labor policies. So change was happening. I think the difficulty we had was there were those in leadership positions that always played the sectarian card and always tried to divide the working classes. When we had the civil rights movement there were a number of Protestants leaders, but there always the fear that the civil rights movement would b taken over by nationalists. That fear proved well founded when the nationalists did take over the civil rights movement, many on the Protestant side who had stood back and watched to see how the civil rights movement would unfold said, “Well, we told you so.” The divisions became more and more apparent then, and that is when we moved into conflict and it became tit for tat, tit for tat until you forgot who was tit and who was tat, it just carried on. As the conflict escalated, the division escalated.

But certainly the reforms, if they had been moved in and implemented more quickly it wouldn’t have helped, because you still had a sizeable section of the Protestant community lead by Ian Paisley who were building up fears in Protestant working classes that this was a way to a united Ireland. We are forty years on and still no closer to a
united Ireland but in 1965 that is what they were screaming about and whipping up fears in the working class. So if those reforms had been brought in more quickly, it might have re-enforced those fears. Again, it is about knowledge and change and how you manage change. But there is no doubt that reforms were needed. I mean it wasn’t just about Catholics, the working class in general was discriminated against as well. But you, as a Protestant were lead to believe you weren’t, because it was your government that was in power. My mother didn’t have a vote, because she wasn’t a ratepayer as she lived with my grandparents. So, the discrimination went across the board but obviously more Catholics were affected by it. The politic reform at the time I don’t believe it would have lead to a revolution at all. If you look civil rights it was bout British citizens asking for British rights in a British state, it had nothing to do with a united Ireland or the Republican ideology at all. Civil rights was about British citizens wanting equality with in their own country. If they had received that, we wouldn’t have had the conflict we did.

**AC:** Given your recent selection to the policing board, what is your view on criminality to loyalist paramilitaries? What can and should be done to stop it?

**DP:** I think it is unfair to say criminality is linked just to loyalist paramilitaries. Criminality is linked to all paramilitaries. There are different types of criminality. Loyalist paramilitaries criminality tends to be more in your face. I remember interviewing the chief of police and him telling me that as loyalist paramilitaries get the money, they spend the money. They show their wealth, on their wrists, on their rings, on their fingers and their cars, and clothes and their holidays. Republican paramilitaries tend to hide their wealth. They are both involved in different types of criminality. Republican paramilitaries would be money-laundering, fuel-laundering…stuff like that. Loyalist paramilitaries tend to be extortion, drugs, and that sort of thing. So there are different types of criminality which are shown in different ways.

And again, while there are loyalist paramilitaries up to their neck in criminality, the leadership of the UVF is totally opposed to criminality and are working really hard to bring an end to it. It is wrong, it's hurting the most vulnerable communities and really it should end, and people need to work in partnership with the police to get it ended, to get it stopped. This loan shark is hurting the most deprived and vulnerable in our community, the most needy in our community. Prostitution exploits women…vulnerable women, drugs again affect working class communities. I mean, to me Loyalist working class communities are almost like poor white trash in the United States in that they are being left and increasingly marginalized. In this area around here, you have the marginalized within the marginalized, you know, and it’s a disgrace in the twenty first century. But criminality is only part of the problem there are a whole lot of other social issues that need to be addressed as well in terms of education, housing and a whole raft of others.

But paramilitaries I know are working hard to end the criminality within their own communities because it is no good, its wrong and it has to stop.

**AC:** So, would you be of the opinion then that criminality in a legal definition, has existed in paramilitaries across the board since their founding, but that now it is committed in a very different mind-set and for different purpose than it was when the Troubles were really beginning to escalate in the early ‘70s?
DP: Well, I think in the early ‘70s criminality was for a purpose. Probably paramilitaries wouldn’t term it has criminality when it was in terms of bank robberies and things like that. It was trying to gain wealth for the purchase of weapons so they probably didn’t view it as criminality. When the extortion started in the ‘70s and stuff like that you had various people, you can look them up yourself, who were synonymous with extortion, particularly in the UDA. And then sometimes when people get a taste of power and a taste of wealth, they find it really difficult to let go, or they find it hard to pass it on to the purpose which it was for in the first place. So, they got the stage now in 2005 where there are criminals with in paramilitary organizations who use the color of paramilitary organizations for their own ends. And that is the difference now, from the ‘70s to now. Paramilitarism is being wound down and brought to an end, they don’t need money for weapons, their prisoners have been released so they don’t need money for welfare, you know, all those issues have to be brought for an end. And I know that the leadership is working hard towards those ends.

AC: On a related note, what do you see then as the future role of paramilitaries in the Northern Ireland peace process and the political process if any?

DP: They have a role if they want to have a role. And I think they need to ask themselves the question, “How do you want to be remembered?” Do they want to be remembered as an organization that degenerated into criminal gangs or do they want to be remembered as an organization that played a combatant role in the conflict and at the end of the conflict they put down their weapons and went home? They can remain as a commemorative organization…I would prefer to see them becoming active in politics, Loyalist politics, or active in community, their community, and doing something for the community. There is a real lack, if you like, of volunteers particularly within Protestant working class areas, and people who really care about their community and want to get involved. If you compare the sort of community infrastructures in Catholic working class areas and Protestant working class areas there is a real discrepancy there so there is a need for people to become involved in their community and become proactive within their community. If they are dedicated to defending their communities and helping their communities, then this is the way they can do it but certainly I would love them to become politically active.

AC: Do you think that is a possibility for them given the current rather hostile stance taken towards the paramilitaries by many politicians especially in Unionism?

DP: Well, its open to them and there are a number of opinions available to them. They can down weapons and go home and go back to work. They can join a political party and become active politically. Or they can become active in community work and give something back into their community. And there are others who will just stick to the crime. So, there are a number of options open to them there, but each one involved a certain degree of commitment. You would like to think that especially in the community and political routes, it would be committed people who genuinely care about their communities who would take those routes. But, you can’t blame some for wanting to go
back to their families and just get on with life. They are absolutely entitled to do that. But the ones that are increasingly turning to crime and sticking with crime, the forces of law and order are coming after them. You can’t hold an organization to ransom by a few criminals who want to keep going, who want to use the paramilitary organization as cover for what they are doing. There is no excuse; paramilitarism is coming to an end and if they want to go the criminal route, they go so alone. The police and other criminal justice agencies will sweep up that.

AC: A big headline in the papers is criminality being on the rise, but I have heard it suggested that the fact there is this increase is a sign that the police are able to do their jobs now and that they are stopping these things which have been going on for some time.

DP: Well, you can read it a number of ways. You can read it as we are now a society which is becoming normal. We are probably the safest place to live in the United Kingdom in terms of crime figure…probably one of the safest places in the world. But as you see a lot of the crime increasing, it is a sign of normalization. People are screaming their heads of saying, “But we don’t want this!” but this is a sign of normalization where you have crime, in any society. Its also a reflection of the demise of paramilitaries, because they don’t control their communities as once they did…people would argue they had an iron grip at one point in time. People within my community actually saw that as a good things because the paramilitaries were the policemen, and there was no anti-social behavior, there were no burglaries, no robberies, no car crime and all those sorts of things. So when you see those things it is a sign of the demise of the paramilitary organizations.

It can also be interpreted as increasing confidence in the PSNI. Where once you did have paramilitaries acting as community policemen, increasingly you have community turning to the proper forces of law and order for help and assistance. I think what is striking in the last crime figures was the increase of the number of crimes within particularly Republican areas in west Belfast. And that tells me the Republican community is increasingly confident in turning to the PSNI for justice and reporting crime and what have you. It also shows you the lessening grip of paramilitaries there. Obviously, there is still a gap because we have had 30 years as paramilitaries acting as social workers, community policemen and everything else, so that dependency is still there. But increasingly the paramilitaries are saying to the communities, “You cannot depend on us, we will not step in and sort things out. You really need to be turning to the police and working with the police.” And to me the community needs to be shown the benefit of working with the PSNI. If they are shown no benefit, then why bother working with them?

AC: The last question I had for you then was if there was one thing you think is missed in terms of the message the PUP is trying to deliver, what would it be?

DP: Our democratic socialism is totally, utterly and completely missed by everyone. But then we have a society here that focuses consistently on the constitutional question of Northern Ireland. As far as I am concerned it was settled in 1998 but when you have
other parties hyping it up, like Sinn Fein and the DUP, then people are going to focus on it. But they have completely missed our social policies and I would hope that when we get to a situation in Northern Ireland that we are looking at issues such as education, health, housing, all those issues that affect people, that is when the PUP will become relevant if you like.

-Interview with Henry McDonald, Ireland editor of The Observer, former security correspondent for the BBC in Northern Ireland, and author of the books UVF and UDA.

Alec Chiquoine (AC): The first question I have is just a little bit of background information about yourself, specifically how you became to be involved in journalism especially looking at security issues in Northern Ireland.

Henry McDonald (HM): Well, I grew up here right through the Troubles, I was four when the Troubles started. My cousin Jack Collin, native of New York City, was a journalist in the 70s and I saw a lot of his work on TV. His books and articles would be lying about the house, so it was sort of a general interest I developed. I did a bit of school journalism but really got involved in college at Queen’s were I was the editor of Gown. I was freelancing while I was at Queen’s as well and also became part of the music, alternative music scene as I was in a band at the time. I continued freelancing into graduate school when I was in Dublin, and the Irish News gave me a break so I went to work for them. This was at a time when there was a surge in violence in Northern Ireland, by both Loyalists and Republicans. Basically, from that period to when I left in 1992 it was a very violent time. I can recall on some occasions going to two or three murders every day. It was constant non-stop, sort of a merry-go-round of terror. So that was the grounding for my work. I saw a gap in the monitoring of the Irish News which were that they were not talking to the Loyalists, which might be because it was a Nationalist newspaper, but I felt that I could see the Loyalist upsurge and I knew the names of many players like Johnny Adair, who were prominent previous to that. I came to develop links with the UDA and later the UVF because I felt their story wasn’t being told properly...even if I abhorred what they were doing and even if I disagree with them ideologically (I was a part time soldier in the Irish Army), I wanted to understand where they were coming from and take interest in them. This dovetailed with issues of collusion as well...a lot of people held the view that Loyalist paramilitaries were just mere puppets. So it was that experience on the streets, literally rapping on the doors of Loyalists, going to the scenes of murders, seeing the corpses in some cases, prompted me to sort of try and connect with them and hear their story, because as I said it wasn’t being properly articulated in the press particularly in the Nationalist media in the North and the media in general in the Republic.

AC: It appears that the UVF has almost always had an agenda to its tactics and operations but hasn’t always been able to put that, and I guess this would go for the UDA as well, out as a political message and sometimes it doesn’t appear that it has wanted to do that...
HM: There are reasons for that. Part of it is historical in that they always left the politics to the politicians, Unionist politicians but that ended with them being essentially used in the 74 and 77 strikes. It is only in the last dozen years or so that they have realized they have a message to. The problem for the Loyalist paramilitaries is that they do not have the same sort of support that the Republican movement had because the majority of people identify with state forces. I mean pro-state terrorists have limited ground on which to operate on because the bravest and the best within the Protestant community are going to join the police or the army. It is lower on down the food chain that you get the membership of the loyalist paramilitaries, which is principally the unemployed and the “under class” if you like. That is much more pronounced in the UDA than it is in the UVF as the UVF is far more selective in who it will recruit. I mean you will get people in the UVF like ex-soldiers and other members of the security forces. But it is as much more to do with class politics and the sub divisions within the working class as anything else. The problem is again that quite frankly the Protestant community do not support pro-state terrorism like they do state forces.

AC: In your mind how have the UDA and UVF tried to balance the ballot box and armalite strategy and have they been more successful at one or the other?

HM: I don’t think you can talk in a homogenous terms between the organizations. For one, the UVF has a centralized command structure…its run on militaristic almost democratic centralist lines with central leadership. The UDA is much more federalized, broken up. People will guard regard their fiefdom as their own and no one else will cross onto it. That is key and vital in understanding their politics and development. The UVF is now at a stage where they gave an interview to The Observer, where they want to completely wind down their military force…they want to completely disband it and simply not have it exist any more. There won’t be meetings…it will be purely political for those who decide to stay, others will go home to live their lives, but some will go political. The UDA is finding that much harder because it does not have a coherent command or message…it is different individuals and fiefdoms. So politics are extremely limited and that is essentially due to the structure of the organization. They got their fingers burned in 1996, the UDP felt like it would break through and John White couldn’t believe it when he was so soundly beaten. This is essentially because the Loyalist and Unionist communities generally will not vote for groups will paramilitary ties. But the UVF are more political in their approach…some of their leadership would be very well read on things like Irish history and have a curiosity about the Irish Republic. Jackie McDonald of the UDA is trying to take that organization in the same direction with his connections to the President of Ireland but it is only of limited value politically. They can’t harvest any votes from ties like that and its shows because at best the UDA, UDP, and UPRG can get the odd city councilor elected.

AC: Why is it that to this day Loyalist communities that at one time may strongly have supported their local paramilitary organization are unwilling to vote for them politically?
HM: There are lots of reasons. Criminality is one…they think of them at times as “thugs in suits” and that turns a lot of peoples’ stomachs. I think another thing is general Unionist community has turned against the GFA and the Loyalist paramilitaries to a large extent are pro-Agreement, or are at least seen to be that way. Cynics would say that is because it got their prisoners out of jail but a more sophisticated analysis is that Loyalists paramilitaries were sort of becoming educated and realized the importance of a compromise. The general swing away from the GFA has really hurt those associated with the Agreement and supporting it. In particular the PUP has suffered politically because of this. The PUP have made tactical errors in not aligning themselves strongly with any mainstream Unionist groups but other fringe parties like the UDP and the Women’s Coalition. They also seem to be too chummy with their old enemies in Sinn Fein. I also the PUP has over concentrated on the importance of the working class, you know the working class is shrinking as a social base, unfortunately as I came from one myself. The PUP message is very traditional old Labor, pre-Clause Four, and I don’t think the Loyalist community buys into that anymore. The majority of them would be middle class, conservative in their ideology. I just don’t think the politics of the PUP are connecting with what would be called middle Ulster. I think they would have a lot of time for David Ervine and pushing the UVF towards peace but not national policies.

AC: In your mind then what motivated the Loyalist paramilitaries to enter into a ceasefire in 1994 and was that process a thought out process?

HM: It was heavily debated…very heavily debated. I think they realized that if they continued to kill once the Irish had stopped, they would be the bad guys. But there were moves to get ceasefires before 1994, remember the Loyalists called a ceasefire in 1991 which lasted for awhile. In 1994 the IRA began targeting a lot of Unionist but especially the UDA as they felt they the unstable underbelly of the whole thing. So it was fairly well thought out process, I mean even the choice of Fernhill House to announce the ceasefire was deliberate and calculated. The UDA wanted to call the ceasefire in the car park of the Maze, but the UVF prevailed because they tried to connect them with historical significant in Carson’s Army and such. It was a long drawn and thought out process but I suspected in the early 90s and ended up being right, that the Loyalists were sending feelers to the Irish government (Chris would know a lot more about this so you should ask him). It was a fairly well thought out process as the people at the top were quite sophisticated people…the problem was when you go down on the base level it isn’t so sophisticated in people like those who joined Billy Wright and the LVF or Johnny Adair. It is a complex picture…in my impression even in the late 80s and early 90s their philosophy was composed of if the Provos stop, we stop…you stop we stop was the mantra running through conversations throughout the Loyalist groups.

AC: Especially recently, how have mainstream Unionist communities as well as politicians attempted to deal with Loyalist paramilitary groups and have there been any changes?

HM: Let’s take two phases, the first phase was David Trimble and the Ulster Unionists. There were huge amounts of attempts by Trimble to try and influence the UVF and UDA. I know for a fact that Trimble put pressure on John White to get the UDA
decommissioning and that almost happened…it really almost did happen but events scraped it. The UVF were less enamored with decommission and actually still refuse to decommission. Post Trimble period is headed up by the DUP. The DUP is likely to have less influence on the Loyalist paramilitaries because they distrust and loath the DUP to an extent. The Republican line is often, “What are you doing about Unionist paramilitaries?” but this is mostly a propaganda stunt because the DUP have even less influence than Trimble did in this area. However, the DUP represents the majority of the people including members of both Loyalist paramilitaries…there is most definitely a contingent of people in these groups who vote DUP and not PUP or anything else. The DUP cannot directly influence or change the policies of Loyalist paramilitaries but indirectly they can because those who vote DUP within the ranks of these organizations will be heard and listened to. Even in areas like the Shankill, people are fed up with the existence of groups like the UVF and UDA and they want them to go away or at least do something different.

-At this point Henry McDonald had a long monologue about the future of the UDA in which he predicted more infighting would break out in that group soon over the issue of whether the group will move towards non-violence, politics, and community work or activities associated with crime, and that the state would step in quickly to contain it.

AC: In there anything that could lead to a return to open violence by Loyalist paramilitaries?

HM: The only thing is if there were some sort of disaster. There are three things that could do it. If there were the equivalent of an Omagh in Northern Ireland…in a way it was horribly fortunate that bomb went off in England because had it been in Northern Ireland, we could still be at war today. But this seems unlikely because those Republican groups who would do such a thing are highly penetrated and infiltrated by the security forces…they can hardly fart without somebody knowing about it. The other possible event would be violence on the interfaces, but there doesn’t seem to be the stomach for enough of that know to trigger anything major in terms of a return to open violence. However, it isn’t completely out of the question and should be watched carefully as a result. Because there are so many fault lines, so many cracks in the social structure of the interfaces, something could always happen. The final thing is the threat of joint authority. I know for a fact that the UVF is close to getting its units to stand down and disband…that is put in jeopardy by threats by the British and Irish governments to bypass a stalled Stormont because it puts the constitutional question and principle of consent back on the table and in contention (especially since it would directly involve the ROI). However, the ROI has been quick to communicate to the Loyalists, via Chris Hudson, that they actually do not have any interest in joint authority. So it was actually Peter Hain’s blunder recently in that announcement which almost caused a major set back in standing down the UVF. There is always the possibility of Blair or Ahern adopting a position on joint authority and the principle of consent for political reasons (attempts to bolster and secure themselves at home) but as architects of the peace process, I think both
know this would be a seriously bad move. But if you leave all those things aside, I think it is unlikely anything will happen that could create a return to full open violence.

**AC:** One of my last questions is more of a personal question in that I would like to find if it you ever found it difficult, in a moral sense, to interact and speak with these groups who were committing such heinous acts?

**HM:** I had a time when I had a friend whose father was killed. His only crime was doing his job delivering Chinese food. I ended up a few days later sitting in a room with the very Loyalist paramilitaries who had likely committed that murder…that really gets to you and sticks in your craw. But, you have to be professional. There doesn’t exist a journalist who is completely impartial and it can because otherwise you couldn’t tell the truth. Its isn’t a question of morality so much as it is one of taste and feeling creepy about those people you are dealing with. I think I did the right thing in the end of letting the world know that what they hold as common stereotypes of these groups and individuals simply are not correct. They have a message, and there was a chance for historic compromise so I wanted to help that…it helped to balance out any individual moralistic qualms I had with the people I was working with. I can remember meetings with the UVF after they had committed a particularly sectarian and brutal murder, and I spent half the meeting screaming at them about what the hell was this, they were saying one things and doing an entirely different thing right after.

**AC:** Is there something people tend to miss, over look or get incorrect when they are looking at Loyalist paramilitaries?

**HM:** What people get wrong is that many suggest there is a guiding brain, external of these groups, either British intelligence or Unionist middle class politicians and radical. They come from the streets, they are organic organizations which are no different from their main base of people which is primarily urban working classes. I think people over analyze the collusion claim. Yes there was collusion, but it was on a smaller and more individual level, and not as some structural happening. Collusion is a mesh of deceit that isn’t the driving brain of either the UVF or the UDA. I also think another point they miss that generally speaking the leaders of these groups are in their 40s, 50s and 60s. They have seen it all and have no desire to go back. The probably is that there are armies of young men out there, fueled on testosterone and bomb culture and paramilitary sub culture who identify with guys who when they were kids a war was going on that directed many of their actions at the time. So it will be very difficult on a management level to control these young people. The Republican movement managed this very cleverly by creating a sub-economy where if you stuck to the party peace line, you were guaranteed a job somewhere. There is a entire social structure where if you don’t tow the party line, you are out, but if you do, you’ll be taken care of. Loyalists’ people management is not so good. So you get young men doing things just to stir up trouble.

I am reasonably optimistic at this stage they will get over that hump. And that is why I think it is a good idea to invest in these deprived Protestant areas (so long as it is done through the correct channels and in a legitimate way so it isn’t creamed off) because we have to get these young guys something to fucking do.
AC: Do you think that will have an effect on the criminality we see?

HM: Well yes but these groups are ridden with criminals. Some will always go off into more “ordinary” crime, but hopefully the majority won’t. The problem is this unemployed army needs to be given something to do.
Bibliography


