

Reflections on Violence

A cross-cultural exploration of the
Northern Ireland conflict and 'peace process'

compiled by

Michael Hall

ISLAND (57) PAMPHLETS

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Introduction

In September 2003 a 22-strong group of young Israelis and Palestinians – brought together by the Young Israeli Forum for Cooperation and the Vision Group – came to Ireland for a five-day programme of study/training workshops and cross-cultural seminars. What was significant about the group was that its members reflected the entire spectrum of political opinion within their two societies. The purpose of the programme was to foster partnerships which might help address the conflict in the Middle East, and to draw lessons from a comparative study of the Israeli–Palestinian and Northern Irish conflicts. This programme, which also assembled an equal number of Northern and Southern Irish participants, was arranged by Margaret Geelan, Omagh.

Impressed by Dr. Joe Camplisson’s work in Northern Ireland and Moldova, Geelan contacted him for guidance on the Belfast part of the programme. Both felt that it would be useful to hear community activists from each side of the Northern Irish conflict speak about the personal journeys they had made and their preparedness to work collaboratively for peace.

This pamphlet relates the Israeli–Palestinian encounter with the panel brought together by Camplisson, the primary focus of which was an exploration of lessons learned from the Northern Ireland conflict and subsequent peace process. Not only did the reflections and views expressed by the panellists prove highly informative to the Israeli and Palestinian participants, but they should serve as a reminder to Northern Ireland readers of the still-raw emotions of their own conflict and of how far people have been prepared to travel in their desire to work towards resolution.

The Israelis and Palestinians also used their time in Ireland to build trust among themselves and to explore attitudes and feelings towards their own conflict, which at that moment was again in crisis, with the internationally-sponsored ‘road map to peace’ seemingly in tatters in the wake of renewed and escalating violence. The dialogue which ensued forms the basis of a separate, but complementary, pamphlet – *Island Pamphlet 58: Making road maps to Peace*.

The organisers, in requesting the participation of Farset Community Think Tanks Project, hoped that these pamphlets could be utilised by the Israeli–Palestinian group as ‘working documents’ which could assist them to move into the next stage of their joint efforts to promote a lasting peace.

Michael Hall, *Farset Community Think Tanks Project*

Reflections on Violence

Dr. Joe Camplisson welcomed the seminar participants and explained that the panel he had assembled comprised four speakers: two representing the Nationalist or Republican tradition; and two representing the Loyalist or Unionist tradition, one of whom was a Unionist politician who had chosen to base himself in the Protestant working-class Shankill Road area of Belfast. Despite the fundamental differences which existed between the panellists – in terms of background and political and cultural belief – the common thread which now drew them together was their desire to work towards a peaceful resolution of the Northern Ireland conflict and their willingness to pursue this objective through collaborative work across the peaceline. Such collaboration had not been easy, especially when the communities they represented had been shooting at one another. Nevertheless, their commitment to peace had withstood such obstacles, and they had also been more than willing to share their experiences for the benefit of the joint Israeli–Palestinian group.

Tommy Gorman

Tommy Gorman is a former member of the IRA, and spent 14 years in jail as a consequence. He was the youngest escapee from the prison ship Maidstone, when he and six others had swum to shore. He has been involved since his release from jail in community work, much of it of a cross-community nature. He is a core worker with Springfield Inter-Community Development Project (SICDP), one of the most innovative projects straddling the West Belfast peaceline.

One of the great icons of Irish history, James Connolly, executed for his part in the 1916 Easter Rising, had warned in 1914 that the partition of Ireland would unleash a ‘carnival of reaction’, North and South. And that is what came to pass. Following the War of Independence two separate states were set up: the Irish Free State, with its 26 counties, and Northern Ireland with six. In the North we had a ‘Protestant parliament for a Protestant people’, and in the South we had a priest-ridden Catholic state – both of them reactionary, both of them right-wing.

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From 1966 there had been demands for ‘civil rights’ in the North of Ireland, and they were pretty innocuous demands: one person one vote, one person one house... things like that – all within a Northern Ireland context. But when those demands met resistance, culminating in the pogroms of 1969, there came the realisation –in my mind at least – that this state was not capable of delivering civil rights, it had to be deconstructed. In August 1969 I witnessed events which made my mind up –and a lot of other people’s minds up –to become involved in the IRA. Along with many others, I believed that the only way we were ever going to achieve real peace and civil rights was to end the Unionist/British monolith which was in control of this country. We believed at that time that the force of argument had been tried and wasn’t working, and the only alternative was the argument of force.

However, I have always been a socialist, and the outcome I sought would have to include social and economic equality as much as any other kind of equality. Indeed, to me, without socio-economic equality there is no equality. And as the avowed aim of the republican movement in 1969 was for the establishment of a secular, socialist republic in Ireland, to me that was something worth fighting for, and, more seriously, worth killing for. And so I became involved in that struggle, and for my sins I have done a substantial amount of time in prison.

By the latter part of the 1980s, however, I felt that we had reached a cul de sac with regards to political violence. I felt that it was achieving nothing, except more deaths, more suffering.

The inter-communal violence of 1969 saw the onset of 30 years of bloodshed. By the latter part of the 1980s, however, I felt that we had reached a cul de sac with regards to political violence; other people had come to that conclusion a lot earlier. I felt that it was achieving nothing, except more deaths, more suffering. I had been released from prison in 1987; I went to university and graduated in 1990. From that time I became involved in community politics, and, more specifically, inter-community politics, working with both sides of the community. And that has been a very rewarding experience. I have met people who would be viewed as my enemies, people from the Loyalist paramilitaries, people from the Protestant community. Yet we have been able to establish good and productive working relationships, which have survived through many difficult times since then.

In 1969 we had no ‘road map’, we had to think retrospectively to people who had died in the past and make up policies along the way. That’s where the policy of a socialist, secular republic came from, and, as I said, it became one of the avowed aims of the republican movement. Unfortunately, as it turned out, as far as I am concerned it was mere rhetoric, and we have now cobbled together a process, an ‘Agreement’, which I feel will eventually collapse. I think there are

similarities between the situation here and the situation in South Africa, where some sort of temporary, cosmetic solution was cobbled together in an attempt to stave off more violence. Yet, in South Africa at the moment the cracks are beginning to show, because people now realise that simply substituting a black president for a white one, and having a new flag, means nothing unless there are also fundamental changes in the socio-economic structures.

I believe it is the same in this country. Unless you change the underlying economic conditions and bring the working class together as a class we're achieving nothing. What we have in this country at the moment is a form of benign apartheid where everything evolves around a religious headcount. There is no crossover between the parties, these parties are pandering to the same old sectarian constituencies as before. *My road map would have us all moving towards a secular, socialist republic with genuine socio-economic change; not a change in personalities but a fundamental change in policies which would cater for the working-class people, Protestant and Catholic. Hopefully those erstwhile revolutionaries in Sinn Féin will start thinking in that direction again, and put the demand for a secular socialism back on the drawing-board.*

Can I make one thing clear: I am totally, totally for peace, but I am against this so-called 'peace process'. I think it is just another form of maintaining a divided, sectarian society, and must ultimately fail.

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Eddie Kinner

Eddie Kinner is a former member of the Loyalist paramilitary organisation, the Ulster Volunteer Force, an involvement which resulted in 13 years imprisonment. On his release he got involved in prisoner issues, and increasingly in community politics. He is currently a member of the UVF's political offshoot, the Progressive Unionist party (PUP). His work regularly takes him across the 'interface' and he has engaged in numerous cross-community initiatives.

I was eleven years old in 1969; I lived on the Protestant side of the interface. The tension in the area was extremely high; people were afraid of what Republicans were planning to do to our community. We knew that their aim was to overthrow the state. There had been extensive rioting in Derry, and there were rumours going around that rioting was going to erupt in Belfast in order to stretch the police even further. And eventually rioting did take place, and with the tension so high in our area it escalated into widespread inter-communal violence.

The most outstanding memory for me –on 15 August, the day of the worst of the rioting –was standing on the street corner where I lived, watching tracer bullets flying down the street, and this was reinforcing all the fears that had been generated in my area. I was convinced that those tracer bullets were coming from the IRA, who were coming down to do all sorts of damage to my community. I later found out it was from the security forces in Shoreland armoured cars, trying to disperse the crowds engaged in the riots. With hindsight, I know that those tensions and fears had been aggravated and exploited by the politicians of the day, and I accept what Tommy was saying about the working class being deliberately divided, but at that stage I was convinced that my community was under serious attack from Republicans. And, in fact, that period was soon followed by a massive campaign of bombings and shootings by the IRA. So I chose to join a Loyalist paramilitary organisation, the Ulster Volunteer Force, for the purposes of retaliating.

In terms of comparing what happened here to what is happening in the Middle East, I guess that one parallel might be that in all conflicts combatants go through a process of dehumanisation – they dehumanise their enemy. When you're right in the middle of a conflict situation a lot of what you do is the result of acting emotionally to what is taking place all around

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you, rather than sitting down and rationalising the situation. Unfortunately, the political leaders who you normally expect to rationalise the situation for people, didn't, and in fact they exacerbated grassroots fears and concerns and exploited them. Perhaps that is something which might be similar in any violent conflict situation.

Anyway, because of what was taking place on the streets I engaged in paramilitary activity and consequently found myself in prison. And, like Tommy, it was through the prison experience that you began to identify what were common issues and common interests, and you began to see that those who you had demonised were human beings like yourself, and they had exactly the same problems that you had. I believe that the prison experience played a major role in the development of a peace process here.

I don't accept that our conflict as such is over, I feel that the root of our conflict is irreconcilable, but what *is* taking place in this process is a *transformation* from violence to dialogue and political persuasion. As a result of my prison experience, and recognising that Republican prisoners had injustices committed against their community and reacted in the same manner that I and others in my

community had reacted, a number of us realised that one way to move things forward, upon our eventual release, would be to identify areas of commonality, and work on these. And I think that such attitudes among ex-prisoners had an impact on the wider community.

After my release I became actively involved with ex-prisoners' groups. In the aftermath of the ceasefires a number of former Republican and Loyalist prisoners had been meeting in order to try and establish methods of reintegrating ex-prisoners back into the community. And through that we are also able to identify and engage in other areas of common interest. I also work with different community organisations, in interface areas. One of the best interface groups that you are likely to find is Springfield Inter-Community Development Project. And I believe that one of the reasons it has been so successful has been because some of those who were either involved in it or supported it were people like Tommy and myself and other ex-prisoners who had established a level of trust and had begun to engage in cross-fertilisation of community ideas.

Jim McCorry

Jim McCorry has had a long involvement in community politics. A founder member of the Irish Republican Socialist Party he endeavoured to promote, often against much scepticism from other Republicans, a radical grassroots socialism, with an emphasis on co-operatives and community participation. He has long been involved with efforts to establish contacts with the Protestant working class, and has been to the forefront in the development of some highly significant cross-community initiatives.

I would like to welcome you here today. I may say things here that people might not like, but I feel there are certain things we have to share with each other in the process of learning that require honesty. Before I begin, could I say that it is important to me to see people like yourselves coming together. I certainly would be much involved in work around the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, mainly in terms of supporting the Palestinians, and that is not being anti-Semitic – but I will address that later. But seeing people coming together is so important. We spent so many years killing each other here, as Eddie and Tommy said, without even trying to touch each other. We lived in isolated communities, we were ghettoised and we killed each other with abandon. And we did not give two fucks who we killed as long

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You might think that I sound a bit despondent, but like yourselves I am driven to understand why we do what we do to each other. Despite all this talk about ‘road maps to peace’ I believe there are certain conditions and relationships that have to be met before there is even a possibility for peace. More than that, I would suggest that many of the factors that are important, if there is going to be peace, lie outside our immediate control.

So, what are these conditions that I talk about? Firstly, there will always be those who espouse violence; they will argue that it is the only way to deal with the conditions and situations that are facing them. In a peculiar way they encompass both the idealist on the one hand and the sociopath on the other. And they exist in your communities, and they exist in our communities. Secondly, it is only when those in control of the political, military and economic situation

begin to appreciate that the indiscriminate exercise of their power is counterproductive, that they will begin to consider change. As long as they believe that what they are doing to other human beings is either sustaining them in power or meeting some minor need they will continue to use violence. The only time they will begin to accept the changes that are necessary is

Violence gives birth to violence, and we will only change when we collectively realise that. And that doesn't justify the killing of innocents but it maybe explains that unless we totally and collectively address violence by the state we cannot condemn those who use violence in response.

when it is clear to them that they cannot maintain their power over time because of changes in demographic, economic or political conditions which their power cannot affect. That was true here. The only time change began to really take place was when the Unionist leadership –not the Protestant/Unionist working-class people who were suffering at the hands of that so-called leadership – realised they could not hold onto power. For two reasons: one, Catholics were outbreeding them, and two, we could actually fight them back, using the same violence that they used against us through their state forces.

It will also only happen when, chillingly, the indiscriminate exercise of their power provokes an equally indiscriminate exercise of power by those they seek to oppress, or by those who support the oppressed. This is not to justify violence, but to say categorically that violence gives birth to violence, and we will only change when we collectively realise that. And that doesn't justify the killing of innocents but it maybe explains that unless we totally and collectively address violence by the state we cannot condemn those who use violence in response, nor can we label them simply as ‘terrorists’ because they do not yield to our terror but instead decide to use the violence back which is left to them. And people do not seem to want to hear that.

This might all sound as if I am promoting violence –and to be honest there are times when I am not against the use of violence by those who are oppressed – but I don't want people to see that as saying that we shouldn't work for an end to conflict. In fact, I think it's critical that we do so. I think we need to learn how violence affects us, not only collectively but as individuals. I have seen good human beings, who started off in 1969 not knowing how to use a gun, yet felt a need to respond to the actions of the state but who then in turn became destroyed by their use of violence. I have seen caring fathers, caring sons, become people who, because they felt that their cause justified it, resorted to violence and ultimately enjoyed killing. People change through violence, and begin to mirror their oppressors.

I am older than most people here and I would have supported the setting up of the Israeli state, and still do. At one time I wanted to go and live in a kibbutz... and I had a real sense of solidarity with the Israeli people who had suffered so much oppression, generation after generation, at the hands of so-called Christians, ending in the horror of the Holocaust. And yet now I ask myself: how are these people, who

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should know the pain of negation, how are they knowingly doing what they are doing to the Palestinians? And a lot of people in my own community, which is Republican and nationalist – and they won't like to hear this either – but my community are doing this to the Protestant people also. I got the shit beat out of me by the state for trying to march in my own town alongside my comrades, and now my community are preventing people from the Protestant community from marching. We become the opposite of those things that we seek.

I think we need to show in our personal, social, economic and political relationships at every level that another way is possible. I believe we need to offer a vision of what can be, we need to work towards change and an understanding of those engaged in violent conflict, for whatever reason. We need to build a groundswell of understanding and acceptance of the need for another way, so that those who espouse violence as the only way forward are confronted, exposed or changed.

How did I arrive at these conclusions? Firstly, through personal experience. Like many others –like Tommy, like Eddie –I carry much pain at the horrors our two communities have inflicted on one another, knowingly and unknowingly, and I have spent these last 20-odd years trying at some level to perhaps compensate for that. Much if it we will never be able to compensate for.

Secondly, through comparative study, such as you are engaged in today. I

feel it is vital that we self-observe our own conflict and relate it to others throughout the world. I would be involved in support of the Palestinian people; I am very proud also of those Israelis who are working against some of what their state is doing, and I know there are many there. I am also involved in work relating to Jammu-Kashmir, concerning the horrors of 10,000 people ‘disappearing’ at the hands of the Indian state –and no-one in this part of the world wants to know because they happen to be a different colour from us.

But the most important thing is that we need to look at our own behaviour, as a species, and we need to begin to change it within ourselves before we can change it within the political and economic structures in which we exist. I would argue that at some level all of us are driven by an urge to power, and unless we begin to acknowledge and confront those things which drive us we will not begin to change. I think that some sign of that desire for understanding and change can be seen in the growing number of young people right across the world who are beginning to question finance capital, globalisation, and the oppression of people by the so-called ‘superpowers’, such as the US. I hope we can build on that.

I wish there was an answer we could provide you with; I wish there was a road map we could give you, but that would imply that we knew where we were going, or how we got there. We don’t. I also agree with Tommy and with Eddie in that I don’t think this is a true peace process here, because I don’t think there is a proper acknowledgement yet of those fundamental issues we need to confront.

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Chris McGimpsey

Chris McGimpsey is a member of the Ulster Unionist Party, whose constituency office is based in Belfast’s largest working-class Protestant community, the Shankill. He is frequently engaged in inter-community contacts, both at party political and grassroots level, and he has organised different cross-party delegations in support of Joe Camplisson’s conflict resolution work in Moldova.

First of all, where I am different from these guys is that I have never been in jail, I have never advocated the use of violence. Much of their experience I can relate to, can understand and can identify with, but it is not *my* experience. We all come from different backgrounds and different starting points. My family were from the Shankill Road but after their house was destroyed by German bombers in 1941 they moved to a town about eight miles from Belfast, in which

there were both Protestants and Catholics, so my friends were a mixture of Protestants and Catholics.

I tell you this because I think it's important that you recognise that in Northern Ireland the experience of those living at the 'peacelines' is not the experience of all the people of Northern Ireland. When we meet Palestinians and Israelis over here they are invariably people who have experienced the hard edge of the conflict between Jew and Palestinian. And when you come over here you invariably meet people who have faced the hard edge of the conflict here. But the vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland have *not* experienced that hard edge. I have relatives seven miles from where we stand who have never heard a bullet fired, never heard a bomb go off. They are good people, it's not their fault, yet others often go to workshops and debates like this and *blame* them: how dare you live in Northern Ireland and nobody has tried to kill you! The majority of our community does not live in these situations. I work and spend all of my time in the Shankill community through personal choice – I identify with that community because that is where my family came from.

Now, what is happening in Northern Ireland today is that communities are waking up to just how useless violence is going to be to solve our problems. Can

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I take you back to some of the things my colleagues [on the panel] said about violence. Eddie talked about being a member of the Ulster Volunteer Force and getting involved in 'retaliatory violence'. That's a phrase many Protestants in his situation would have used, and indeed I too would have used it – many people from the Protestant community would have believed that 'our' violence was 'retaliatory'. And why? Because of the belief that the 'other' community, the Catholics, were the ones who had started all the trouble. At that stage we hadn't come to the realisation that *no* community 'started' all the trouble.

The reality was that the two communities lived cheek-by-jowl with one another and just couldn't get on, and it was *the conflict between two communities* which caused the trouble – not this community, or that community, but *both* communities. So Eddie's violence was not 'retaliatory', it was violence. It might have been defined as legitimate by his community, but it was not necessarily retaliatory. Jim and Tommy said the same thing: when the state uses violence you react, so 'our' violence is retaliatory. Many people spend their lives in Ireland, and I suspect in the Middle East, claiming that every violent act of their own side is a reaction to some violent act of their enemy. 'You started it...' 'What about...? what about...?'

Anyway, I decided to leave Ireland and go to America. I went to university and began to read Irish history, and that's what changed me. Because I was

suddenly reading stuff that brought me to the realisation that *both* sides were at fault. As I started to learn more about our conflict it began to dawn on me that Nationalists had significant grievances –there were major issues of concern that they had and they were absolutely right. And that is a major drawback if you want to involve yourself in local party politics! If my son ever said to me that he wanted to get involved in local politics I would tell him: don't try to understand the other side like me, for you'll never get on, nobody on your own side will want to know you because you understand the 'other' side.

Now, that's part of where my experience has brought me. As I say, it's as legitimate as that of my three colleagues, but very different. The question is:

how do we try to put all this together and move things forward? It seems absolutely clear to me that violence is never going to resolve the problem. I think Jim's actually wrong; I don't think Catholics are going to out-breed us – it used to be known as the 'revenge of the cradle'. I don't think that if there was a Catholic majority tomorrow in Northern Ireland that the majority of people

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would vote for a United Ireland, a large proportion of Catholics are actually quite happy being part of the UK. And under the EU the border is becoming increasingly irrelevant. When I was a child you couldn't tell the border –on trips to Dublin you could be in and out of Northern Ireland a dozen times and you wouldn't know. Then the IRA came along and put the border on the map – it now took you hours to get to the South!

What we have got to realise is that communities first of all need to reject violence, and I think that's what they're doing; they haven't completed that process, but they're working on it. The political leaders have also got to take their lead from the community. Often in these issues the communities are ahead of their political leaders. So the political party leadership has got to play 'catch-up'. But you also need to work on the building of trust between the two communities. Go out onto the street outside this building and talk to the average child – who will be a Catholic –and if he's honest he'll tell you he hates Protestants. Go another 400 yards over the peaceline and the average child you meet there will be a Protestant, and if he's honest he'll tell you he hates Catholics.

Now, that's what we have got to build with. We have had generation after generation where it was easy to simply blame the 'other side' – the Nationalists blamed the Unionists, the Unionists blamed the Nationalists. In the Unionist community the PUP blame the other Unionists. On the Republican side, anti-peace process Republicans blame the current Sinn Féin leadership... everybody

has somebody else to blame. At some stage we have got to realise that *the blame is in ourselves*. I suspect it is the same in the Middle East.

I have been going to cross-community meetings for 20 years, and often somebody would come along and state: ‘I just want to say I am a Protestant and I don’t have a sectarian bone in my body.’ And I would say to myself: where is he coming from! *My* body is full of sectarian bones. The way you deal with sectarianism, or anti-Semitism, or hatred of Palestinians, is to recognise that *you* feel it, come to terms with it yourself and deal with

The way you deal with sectarianism, or anti-Semitism, or hatred of Palestinians, is to recognise that you feel it, come to terms with it yourself and deal with it internally. Once you have won that particular battle in yourself you can start to win that battle with your friends and colleagues.

it internally. Once you have won that particular battle in yourself you can start to win that battle with your friends and colleagues. And once you begin to reach out, you’ll find that the majority of people around you are actually doing the same and are also trying to reach out. And that’s really the message I want to give you. But it started off with me sitting down with books and beginning to learn about the other side. That’s how you’re going to come to terms with the conflict. And that’s where you’ll move forward.

Question and answer session

Camplisson then opened the discussion to questions from the floor.

Note: The following initials are used to identify speakers in the remainder of this document:

Panellists: **TG** (Tommy Gorman); **EK** (Eddie Kinner); **JM** (Jim McCorry); **CM** (Chris McGimpsey)

Organisers: **JC** (Joe Camplisson); **BM** (Barney McCaughey)

Participants: **I** (Israeli); **P** (Palestinian); **NI** (Northern Irish); **RoI** (Republic of Ireland)

Also: (m): male; (f): female

RoI(f): Tommy¹, your concern is obviously with the working class. Do you feel that sectarian differences were used to obscure the class issue?

TG: Winston Churchill once said: ‘When we’re in trouble, we’ll use the Orange² card.’ And that’s what they did. When there was any sign of unity among the

1 Immediately after Tommy Gorman had spoken a number of questions had been directed at him. However, due to time constraints, questions were not directed at the other three speakers until after their presentations. For the sake of conciseness the question and answer sessions have been amalgamated – this is why Tommy Gorman initially appears to have had more questions addressed to him.

2. The word ‘Orange’ – after William of Orange (William III) – is often used to represent the Protestant/Unionist community just as the word ‘Green’ is used to represent the Catholic/Nationalist community.

working class, the Orange card was played, because that brought the constitutional issue to the forefront again, and, unfortunately, for many working-class people that overrode everything and the class issue became incidental. To me, this present process has given the British *two* cards: an Orange card and a Green card, to be used in times of difficulty. Sectarianism is a blight on this society and it has been used to keep the working classes apart. The vast majority of the combatants in this conflict were working class, and the vast majority of casualties were working class. The people who were poor at the start of this conflict are still poor – nothing has changed.

NI(m): Tommy, I accept that you're against the peace process, but you also state that you're opposed to violence. Do you feel there any lessons, given what happened here, that might be relevant to the present conflict in the Middle East?

TG: My current attitude towards violence and conflict developed when I was in prison, for in prison you have time to reflect. Outside in the heat of battle there is no time to really think. Now, I'm not suggesting that everybody in Palestine or Israel goes to prison... but I urge everyone to constantly evaluate what's happening around them, and to look hard at what they themselves, as individuals, are engaged in. Ask yourself: is what I and others around me are doing really making a change for the better? And if it's *not* making a change which you feel is for the better, if it's simply killing more people, if it's isolating communities ever more, if it's pushing people apart instead of bringing them together, then you would need to think really carefully about it all.

I urge everyone to constantly evaluate what's happening around them, and to look hard at what they themselves, as individuals, are engaged in. Ask yourself: is what I and others around me are doing really making a change for the better?

I(f): Personally, as someone who has been advocating, for a long time, the need for a peace process, it is very hard for me to accept that you can be for peace and be against *any* peace process, because in my opinion any peace process is better than nothing. In the end you will have to compromise, you will have to compromise on the nitty-gritty, on the very basic facts of life. As an ex-prisoner you must have had time to reflect on that?

TG: The difficulty is that I don't accept that there is a peace process here. I believe that it is a temporary measure, a *pacification process*, which is something totally different. I believe that unless real issues are addressed, inevitably there will be more conflict. If you go down the street and see two kids beating each other with sticks, you might take those sticks off those kids and gain a temporary peace, but they will find other weapons. I believe that any peace process must

be founded on fundamental change, not cosmetic, temporary, cobbled-together change, and what we have in this country is a form of benign apartheid, where the two communities are still in a state of separate development, there is nothing being done to reach out across that divide to bring the two communities together, bring the working classes together. Obviously, the fact that there is an absence of death and killing is welcome, but it has to go beyond that; a true peace process has to address those fundamental issues which lie at the heart of society's divisions.

RoI(m): Tommy, you voice your opposition to the peace process. I was just wondering what you see as the main faults with it and what alternative you would recommend?

TG: There is no social content. What we had at Stormont [before it was suspended] was pseudo-politics, there was no opposition—you had a centre-right coalition of parties with little difference between their party political policies. Erstwhile revolutionaries of Sinn Féin were privatising the health service and

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education system. I would like to see some sort of social content which attacks poverty, the whole inequality within society. Being a Republican I had thought that in some form of noble struggle we were going to bring about an egalitarian society, but in reality 'new' Sinn Féin is as conservative as the other parties.

P(f): Chris called our conflict the 'Jewish-Palestinian' conflict, implying that it is a religious conflict. Actually it is not a religious conflict. Under the Ottoman Empire the Jews and the Palestinians were living together side by side without any problems. It's a land and independence conflict. But the question I want to ask is this: The Oslo agreement endured for ten years but with a mistake from Mr Sharon it become again *intifada* and renewed problems in Palestine. Do you think that any such mistake could happen here between the Protestants and Catholics which would undo all the gains of the peace process?

JM: That 'mistake' you refer to with regard to Ariel Sharon... I take it you were talking about the visit to the Temple in Jerusalem which precipitated rioting? That was no mistake, that was a planned, calculated attempt to gain political power at the expense of any peace process!

I(f): No, I think you are exaggerating there. First, Israel is not only the 'bad' side in this—listen to Chris—and when Sharon went to the Temple he did not plan to make a war; the war was the strategic plan of Arafat also.

NI(m): Do people really think that the conflict here could start up again?

TG: I think that if the underlying problems of poverty and inequality are not addressed there is always the potential for violence. I have been working at this interface for a long time and we get regular visits from politicians, and each time we show them the sort of poverty we are working amongst. There are 12 electoral wards on this interface and those wards have consistently remained in the top 20 most deprived wards in Northern Ireland. Now, through our work we can keep a lid on the problem, but if people continue to live in poverty and deprivation, and all the ills that come with that, then there is the potential for violence. The interface areas need a massive injection of resources. Traditionally they have not only been the most deprived and the most divided, but the most violence-ridden. I believe the past 30 years have been a waste. At the start I believed we were going to make real change here, but after 30 years and countless deaths I believe that nothing of real substance has changed.

NI(f): I have been involved in programmes where we have taken kids away together and they have got on the best and discussed the issues that are going on in their communities, but I find that when they go back to their communities they have to conform to the same patterns again.

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TG: That's why Springfield Inter-Community Development Project came into being. Despite these

'ghetto-away' days to the States or wherever the kids were coming back to the same shit. Very few of any relationships formed could be sustained once they returned to their own communities. Our idea was to concentrate all our efforts on helping to develop those communities.

NI(f): Our idea was to allow them to discuss things with people from the other community – something they couldn't normally do while in their own communities.

JM: It is surprising to me that nobody has mentioned the role of the external factor – Tommy touched upon it – the role of England here. The external role of England here is critical, just as the external role of America is critical, because the interests of America are being met within the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, not the interests of either the Israeli or the Palestinian people. At some stage if they will withdraw, and at some stage if the English will say that they will get out of Ireland, we will resolve the situation ourselves. People from both sides here work together on a daily basis, we share with each other, we have learnt from our conflict, but at some stage the English have got to stop using and abusing both of us in their interests. Similarly, if you want peace between *your* peoples, you have got to say to America: you get out, it's not about your interests, it's about *our* interests. Because every child that's killed by another

rocket, another helicopter, is killed in the interests of America. Every child that's blown up by a suicide bomber is killed in the interests of America! Tell them to get out, just as we're telling the English to get out!

CM: If there had been no British forces in Northern Ireland over the last 30 years we would have had a massive civil war. Republicans killed 2000 people. If there had been no British forces here it could have been 20,000. Loyalists killed 1000 people – it could have been 15,000. Any evidence I have from talking to people in the upper echelons of the British state, which I have done at Labour Party conferences and all sorts of places – indicates that the British would leave Northern Ireland tomorrow; Northern Ireland does not serve any strategic interest to the people in Westminster, that is my understanding through talking to them. With regard to the Americans, the peace process would never have got as far as it has in Northern Ireland without American influence. What has been happening in Northern Ireland has not been good for England: if England could have got out of here 30 years ago, they would have. Anyway, when Republicans talk about 'removing the British presence' they're really talking about us, the Protestants, for we're the *real* 'British presence' in Northern Ireland.

I wish that the peace that we have struggled to build in Northern Ireland would strengthen and would continue, and that the days when violence would be seen as an option for the people of Northern Ireland would be something for the history books and not for the newspapers.

RoI(f): I am involved in the Peace Society at the University of Limerick and earlier this year we went to the Lebanon and met with Hizbullah, which was very difficult for me personally, to meet people who advocate change through violence. But when we met them and different political parties I asked them all one question, which I would like to put to the panel members: If you had one wish what would that be?

TG: In *The Shawshank Redemption*, when one of the main characters was speaking at his parole hearing, he said that if he had a wish he would like to go back and talk to the wee boy who was him when he was 18. If I could do that, that would be my wish.

JM: I wish we could collectively understand the insanity of our species, because if we could do that then at some stage we may be able to effect change.

EK: I would wish for equality, total equality.

CM: I guess that I wish that the peace that we have struggled to build in Northern Ireland would strengthen and would continue, and that the days when violence would be seen as an option for the people of Northern Ireland –

Republican, Unionist, Protestant or Catholic –would be something for the history books and not for the newspapers.

RoI(f): Earlier this week in Glencree we were talking together –the Northern Irish and the Southern Irish –and sharing perceptions of each other. And the Northern Irish believed that the Southern Irish don't have very much interest in the conflict. And that is quite true. So, to the Republicans on the panel I want to know your opinion of the Southern Irish, especially as you're fighting so hard to achieve a United Ireland. And Chris, you said that England would really like to get rid of the problem of Northern Ireland. So, to the Unionists I want to know your opinions about the British. One side is fighting hard to remain part of Great Britain, and the other side is fighting hard to join the Republic, and yet it seems that both these external actors are not particularly interested.

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TG: I was never fighting just to annex the 6-counties onto the 26-counties politically. In my eyes we were fighting for a *new* Ireland, and the first step to that new Ireland was the dismantling of the corrupt Unionist state in the North. From that we would then move to democratise the 26-counties, which I believe is a corrupt, priest-ridden, cronyist society, as indicated by all the enquiries into corruption down there. I laugh at people who talk of the 'Celtic Tiger'. You have massive wealth co-existing alongside massive poverty in the Irish Republic, and to me that can never be right. I didn't want simply a 32-county state, I thought I was part of a movement that was going to bring about a new, socialist republic.

JM: In relation to what Chris said, there is nothing to have stopped the British over the past 30 years from giving us a timed declaration of intent to withdraw. They say they have no selfish, strategic interest in Northern Ireland. If so, what is keeping them from giving such a declaration? I believe in our people, in the Republican and Nationalist people, and in the Protestant and Unionist people, I know we can build a new country together. But we will not do it as long as these people claim to be referees between us. They are not referees, they are a basic part of the problem!

RoI(f): What is your position on the Southern Irish government then, because they are glad to work hand-in-hand with the English government?

JM: I am ashamed that people have died in struggles to establish a state in the South which is a disgrace, which has led to nothing but poverty for so many people down there, and which, as Tommy said, is cronyism of the worst possible kind –and I feel that that was such a waste. And you're right when you

say that they don't care about up here. They don't care, but they're also afraid of the Protestant people, they're afraid of what's going to happen.

CM: Earlier I made the point about the British state not wanting Northern Ireland. But a similar situation exists with regard to the South, as I've learned from many discussions with Southern Irish politicians. For example, I put to some senior figures in Fine Gael one day that, as democrats, because the majority of people in Northern Ireland did not wish to become part of a United Ireland they should accept it; and by the same token, if 51% of the population voted for inclusion in a United Ireland, then as a democrat I would accept it. To which one of them said: 'Good God, that would be our worst nightmare!' He said: 'If the Brits with all their power couldn't contain 600,000 Catholics, then how the Hell are we going to handle a million Protestants?' And that's part of the reason the British have never said 'we want out in five years', because that would be like saying: 'Armageddon starts in five years and you've five years to prepare for it.' I think that's why they didn't say it.

JM: Chris, comrades who fought each other, from organisations that killed each other, can now work together, can share together. We are capable of doing this, why do we not believe in ourselves? Can we do it or can we not?

CM: But that's a totally different question.

EK: Part of the peace process here involves a transformation to political persuasion. But in disadvantaged areas there isn't the resources, the capability. Chris talked about going and reading books, but the majority of kids in disadvantaged areas are leaving school without the wherewithal to read those books, they don't have people directing them along those lines. They're going to engage in violence because of their circumstances. They're going to react, they don't even feel they're part of normal society at times. They have been marginalised, even criminalised, and they're going to be reacting to their social conditions because their society and the state they live in is not prepared to invest in them. Those are the kind of problems that are going to take place.

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Camplisson then drew that part of the proceedings to a close.

The participants now broke up into two groups, one composed of the Northern and Southern Irish, the other composed of the Israelis and Palestinians. Barney McCaughey chaired the latter session:

BM: On the panel you saw four people talk about our conflict. And while they reflected very different political backgrounds and attitudes towards that conflict, what struck me most was that, having lived through it, there is a similarity in what they are saying now about the self-defeating nature of violence, and the need to work together. And all of them *are* doing this – they are working very hard and very effectively in this community to improve it and take it towards peace. So – what have you learned from today, if anything? What did you feel might have been the factors which have helped us move towards peace, and what are the things which you think might have been, or still are, hindering us?

I(m): Can I say something about the international involvement. One of the speakers was against international involvement. He said: ‘just leave it to us, we will handle it, leave us alone, you’re

only here for your own interests.’ That might be partly true, but I think that in Ireland and the Middle East there is no way we could have gone as far as we did without such involvement. And not only from the big countries, but also smaller countries helping us, such as with seminars like this. Maybe outside pressure is a very important thing.

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I(m): I think what also helps in the Irish situation is the support the peace process gets from Europe – not only politically but with funding – it doesn’t just rely on the involvement of the United States. Together they can help manage the situation.

I(m): And not only in terms of support. I think EU integration itself assists in the move towards peace, because it has made the differences between Northern Ireland and the Republic less of an issue – in our case we do not have a similar framework in our region. Also, because the divisive line in the Northern Ireland conflict was to a certain degree religious, I believe that the increasing secularisation of society here was very relevant to assist moves towards peace. And I believe that it can also be an important element in our own conflict.

I(m): I also want to comment on what the [panel] speaker said about not wanting outside involvement. Mediating in negotiating processes is a well-

known diplomatic method for tackling conflicts, and I believe that if it saves time and blood –which I think has been the case in many different conflicts – then it should be tried. Otherwise, what is the option? To try and work it out alone, even though there is no trust between the opposing sides? In that case I think many more people will only die along the way. I would like to know what is the alternative to mediation?

P(m): We fully support mediation, but the problem is that it has been proved that there is no *neutral* mediator intervening in our conflict, most are biased towards one side. And even when Javier Solana, the EU’s foreign policy chief, visited Palestine last week he refused to meet with Arafat and the Palestinian Authority because of Israeli pressure. What kind of intervention and mediation is it if the mediators are told who they can and can’t meet?

I(m): If Solana does not want to talk to Arafat maybe part of the problem lies with Arafat and not with the Europeans?

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BM: Although Jim McCorry said that he believed that outside help was not helpful, many other people here would not necessarily agree with that. They would feel that we did make progress because Europe and

President Clinton threw in a lot of energy to the peace process here. Perhaps what Jim was also suggesting was that when outsiders are trying to push us into an agreement it’s easy for us to view such an agreement as someone else’s responsibility. Jim would believe that until we’re left alone looking at each other, and there’s no-one else to blame, then we will never reach a genuine, lasting settlement. In other words: we really have to work it out for ourselves.

P(f): But in the Irish conflict the mediators seemed to treat each party as equal, and did not support one side or the other. That is not what’s happening in our conflict in the Middle East.

BM: Yes, but when the big push from America first began, the Protestant/Loyalist side here was highly suspicious and didn’t really want any part of it. They felt that the past history of America was of support for Irish Republicanism –in the way that Palestinians see America as always supporting Israel –so there was a similar problem, because American involvement was seen as prejudiced. I actually think it was the quality of Clinton’s envoy, Senator George Mitchel, which helped overcome that suspicion, and he did seem to convince people that the US wanted to be fair to all sides.

I(m): One of the most important things we got from hearing about the Irish

experience –and it was something we also got from a seminar we had with the South African ambassador in Dublin – was that, in both conflicts, the release of political prisoners helped a lot to build trust. And I think it might be useful in our case as well.

BM: Prisoner releases also angered and hurt some people here.

I(f): I think these questions about the role of the mediator are avoiding the issue – it is not the main issue. Once two peoples want to make peace and make a commitment to peace, the mediators are only a means to achieve it, they are just helpers. I am not sure what happened in Ireland during your peace process, but I believe that if there is strong leadership then they can ensure the continuation of the peace process no matter what threatens to derail it. We need people and leaders who are truly committed to achieving peace, who won't allow peace negotiations to fail just because of everyday situations. But I have a strong feeling that our leadership, and the Palestinian leadership, are trying to *avoid* peace, because they know that once there is security we are going to have to deal with other issues, ones that they are not yet ready to cope with.

What I have learned from today is that both sides always blame each other when things go wrong. We don't criticise ourselves for what we are doing, and we always trying to defend our own side and blame the other for what has happened.

P(m): Yes, one of the panel speakers talked about the poverty issue; in our case it is also things like the illegal settlements and the refugees.

I(f): What I have learned from today is that both sides always blame each other when things go wrong. We don't criticise ourselves for what *we* are doing, and we are always trying to defend our own side and blame the other for what has happened. I don't know about the Irish situation, but in our own case civic society wasn't involved when decisions were made by politicians [during the Oslo process] and that hindered the process, because explanations were not given. And also, up until today dialogue between the two sides, our two peoples, is nowhere near enough, and that hinders the development of any real process.

I(m): Communication is a vital part of any peace process, and I believe that because the Northern Irish share the same language – English, with no disrespect to the Irish language – and can understand each other, it means they can read each other's newspapers, and read opinions expressed by the other side. I believe that such communication can assist the process of resolution. Our problem, however, is that Israelis and Palestinians have no common language, so we do not know what is being said in each other's newspapers. It also means that we do not even know when each side is calling for peace.

I(m): We not only need to engage in more self-criticism and communication and dialogue, we need to have a far more extensive understanding of each other – as Chris said earlier today. We need to communicate and understand the bigger picture, the background of both sides, the mentality and the reasons behind the freedom fighters, from both sides, and why they are doing what they are doing. We don't have to accept what they are doing, but we need to understand 'why', in order for us to break down the barriers between us, in order for us to communicate on a higher level. And the least that we can do is to understand that on both sides there are people who want peace.

I(f): It is not enough for the Palestinians to know there is a peace camp on the Israeli side, and for the Israelis to know that there is a peace camp on the Palestinian side – the two sides must *communicate more* to know more about each other and to expand that circle.

P(f): I think one very important difference in our situation is the refugee question. It will take a long time to find a solution to this problem. At the moment the number of refugees *outside* Palestine is almost the same as the number of inhabitants *inside* Palestine.

I(f): I think that education is a very important part of a peace process, because I have never met a Palestinian before I was 22 years old. And that caused fears and a lot of ignorance, and I am sure it is the same on the Palestinian side. A lot of you do not get to see Israelis, other than soldiers. So I think there might be a need for education in bringing children together from younger ages, going to kindergarten together.

BM: There are similarities in Northern Ireland. Many people live in different communities, go to different schools, often don't feel safe working in certain areas, and even engage in different sports. But there is an integrated education movement here which is trying to bring Protestant and Catholic children together.

I(f): I don't see that you will get our children going to the same schools, the way you can here. But at least you can make an input into what the children are taught. Especially about each other. The situation today is unsatisfactory. If you go to a kindergarten operated by Hamas I don't think that they teach that Israel has the right to exist. We each have to recognise the other side's right to exist, and I think that process can begin through the education system.

The following evening the Israelis and Palestinians engaged in an exploration of their own conflict, which forms the basis of a separate pamphlet. However, they did feel that discussion of the Northern Irish conflict and peace process had been very useful to them. At the very least, getting away from the Middle East to a 'neutral venue' had enabled them to meet one another, something impossible to do back home.