Reconciliation:
a false goal?

Farset/Inishowen & Border Counties Initiative

compiled by

Michael Hall

ISLAND (82) PAMPHLETS

*The following participated in the discussions
from which this document was compiled:*

Jean Brown

Michael Hall

P J Hallinan

Jackie Hewitt

John MacVicar

Mary McCallion

Barney McCaughey

Jim McCorry

Billy Patterson

Jackie Redpath

Anthony Quinn

Betty Rice

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Introduction

For some years now a number of descriptive labels have been attached to much of the work that is going on at community level. Labels which imply that what we are all ultimately working towards is 'peace', 'reconciliation', 'conflict resolution', 'community development' and so on. Now, sometimes we use these labels because they have been attributed to our work by others – government and funders in particular – but quite often we use them freely ourselves. And yet every now and then some of us ask: just what *is* it that we are engaged in, and are these labels in any way accurate? The truth is that we don't take the time –and quite often we don't *have* the time – to sit down and examine what these labels really mean. Nor do we question *why* we attach them to our work, other than that they are part of the obligations made upon us by funders. More importantly, we don't try to analyse whether these labels –and the concepts associated with them – are actually helping our work, or *hindering* it.

It was such questions which motivated the calling together of this Think Tank, so that people who have been involved in grassroots activism for the past three decades could engage in a wide-ranging debate on this whole topic. Is 'reconciliation' a red herring? Is it a false goal, imposed upon our work by others, people with a different understanding of grassroots realities? What does 'peace' really mean? What does 'community development' actually involve? Whose agenda are we working to, and does that agenda bear any resemblance to what motivated many of us to first get involved in grassroots issues all those years ago? Where do the funders fit into all of this, and what is the result on the ground of their current strategies and policies? Is there any way that community activists can help to amend or change those policies?

The participants to this Think Tank have, between them, a vast experience in community issues, much of it dating back to 1968 and '69, when the Troubles changed life in Northern Ireland irrevocably. As some of them noted during the course of the discussions, the irony is that in many ways the community sector has spent the last thirty-odd years trying to recover some of the grassroots gains painstakingly made at that time, but lost because of the escalating violence.

This pamphlet, which gives an overview of the various points made during the discussions, does not attempt to reach definitive answers. Indeed, as the reader will see, even community activists have no real consensus on the topic. But at least we hope to have opened up a much-needed and long-overdue debate on the whole issue. We hope that this exploration will prove of interest, and benefit, to community activists and funders alike.

Jackie Hewitt *Manager, Farset/Inishowen & Border Counties Initiative*

Reconciliation: a false goal?

Initial thoughts

The participants began their approach to the topic by sharing some general thoughts.

> Quite often I feel that we have simply become a cog in a new industry, a 'peace & reconciliation industry', which is not only throwing vast sums of money at our perceived 'problems', but, in the process, has created a burgeoning infrastructure of funding agencies. And that throws up a number of questions. In the chain of operation of this funding – that is, the path between the funder (Europe, British government, America, etc.) and the supposed recipients (our communities, interface areas, border counties, etc.) –where does this new infrastructure (the intermediate funding bodies, etc.) sit? And, more importantly, what is its primary purpose? Is it simply there to assist in the smooth transfer of funding from donor to recipient, or does it perform the role of obstacle course, acting as a 'gatekeeper', determining just who will, and who will not, be able to access this funding? And, if the latter, what criteria does it operate under, and *who* determines that criteria? Is this funding infrastructure being influenced by a government-led agenda, which might not welcome radical grassroots approaches to problem-solving, and therefore attempt to squeeze such initiatives out of the funding loop? And even if such government pressure is not the case, do those who actually operate this infrastructure adhere to a middle-class or professional set of assumptions, which might be at variance with those held by many grassroots community activists?

> I often feel that there seems to be a general acceptance that 'reconciliation' is some vague, waffly concept which some funders tack on to their application forms without thinking too much about it, but which isn't meant to be overly prescriptive. The reality is often quite different: for some groups the need to engage in 'reconciliation' is a *stipulation*, without which they will be refused funding. There is growing anger at present at the way money is being withheld from some groups within the victims' sector. Government made a big publicity issue about all the funding support they were going to be providing to victims. What they didn't say was that this funding would come with very definite strings. Many victims' groups have recently been turned down for funding because they don't engage directly in 'reconciliation' with members of the 'other' community. But this is to deny to victims' groups the much-needed opportunity to work on their *own* individual needs first: reintegration, retraining, not to mention coming to terms with loss, etc. Such work needs to be done *before* many victims can feel able to sit down with people from the other community. However, at present, if they don't show a preparedness to sit down then they might not receive funding. Government

and funders are trying to *force* people into situations they might not be ready for at present. So, in the case of the victims' sector, the *insistence* on 'reconciliation' presents a serious problem.

'Re-conciliation' means bringing people back together again, but had they *ever* been 'conciled' in the first place?

A few years ago I took up a job as a community development worker in Twaddell Avenue, thinking: well, I'm here to try and help this community with issues about youth, the needs of the elderly, how to rejuvenate the area, and such like. And then the whole Holy Cross dispute erupted and I basically got thrown in at the deep end. I spent three years fire-fighting, and in those three years the Protestant community in the area suffered some 325 attacks from the Nationalist community in Ardoyne. That's just to put it into perspective. And yet, the last six months of my post were funded by *six* different agencies, and I tried to tell these funders: do you not understand the message you are sending out to this community? The bottom line is: if you can't be arsed to pay him, what does that say about the opinion you have about our community? Government urges 'reconciliation' but often does not adequately support those groups actively working towards it.

What is even more galling is that, despite the patient work that many people engage in at the grassroots, especially at the interface, that work and the groups we have patiently built up, are bypassed or side-lined. Some wiz-kid comes in from a government department and says: it's terrible here, we'd better put some money in. And they parachute new workers into the area who often, despite some of them showing a genuine commitment, haven't a clue about local realities. But that government department either never noticed the work already going on, or felt it couldn't be controlled in the same way a new group could, especially one dependent on them. They allow the infrastructure that people on the ground had worked for years to build up to basically fall apart, often because some insignificant person in a government department thinks: well, we've funded them long enough, we'll try and do something else now.

They also seem to feel that reconciliation efforts are only needed right on the interfaces. They forget that reconciliation is required *throughout* communities, even those situated well away from the interfaces. Indeed, because of the contacts built up over time it is often the case that people living and working right on the peace-lines are actually *more comfortable* with the 'other' side than those who have never had any face-to-face contact. I know many people who are afraid to travel certain routes, even in the safety of a bus, because they might pass through an interface area. *They* need to feel safe too, they need to be involved in whatever positive work is going on.

I recall at the time of the ceasefires a certain well-known media commentator wrote an article in which he almost encouraged people to run out into the street and throw their arms around each other, and kiss and hug and make up,

as if what had happened over the last 30 years didn't really matter. And I think that we need to have some definition of what peace is, what reconciliation is all about, because it means different things to different people. Especially to victims. When you have someone who is being pressurised, cajoled, to sit in the room with a person who was either directly or indirectly responsible for the death of their loved one –and that's in both communities –can that *really* be called reconciliation? Okay, maybe we need to draw a line in the sand and try and get on with our lives, but in doing so we have to accept that while some of us will be able to reconcile – whatever that means – for others it will take time, and some people will *never* reconcile. There needs to be an acceptance that that is the case. There are people out there who just say, 'I'm sorry, I have been hurt so badly that I just can't do that.' And *all* these categories of people are entitled to equal support. As it is, if you openly admit that you can never see yourself being reconciled with the 'other' community, then you are left by the wayside, certainly by the funders.

I haven't seen myself as being involved in 'reconciliation work', or 'cross-community work' per se. In the early 1990s I took up a job with the Greater Shankill Development Agency and it was all about the development of the Shankill, which is a single-identity community. And I recall that four weeks into the job one of the top people from the Community Relations Council came to see me, to ask: where do we fit in? how can we help? I talked with him for some time, and then said, 'Look, sorry, but in terms of priorities, 'community relations' is well down our agenda.' I was being honest, and there's only one structured piece of reconciliation work that I've been involved in. Having said that, I have been involved in numerous unstructured, unfunded work across the communities, and to a degree across the border. It's been where there has been mutual interest. It might be economic, it might be around survival needs, and I found that to be the most useful. But the only work I have been involved in which was specifically cross-community and cross-border has been the IFI Better Horizons programme through Springboard. I found that fascinating and useful. Yet even within that, we did struggle with the term 'reconciliation', for the IFI wanted it to be incorporated into our programme. And even though our programme involved young Catholics from West Belfast, young Protestants from the Shankill, and young Catholics from Tallaght in Dublin, 'reconciliation' as such was not a pressing priority. We struggled with the term for a while and then abandoned it. And I suppose what we talk about now – and again it is very hard getting words for this – is that our programme is about *understanding and appreciating diversity*. Because what we are finding is that kids coming together from Dublin and Belfast – Catholic/Protestant, North/South – have other big issues they need to deal with: about diversity, homophobia, race issues, asylum seekers, or whatever. And these issues are now actually becoming much more predominant to young people than the Catholic/Protestant thing, certainly in our experience. What attracted me to Springboard and Wider Horizons wasn't bringing Protestants and Catholics together in an effort to encourage 'reconciliation' but because the programme offered these young people, who were all from

very deprived communities, the opportunity of getting international work experience: they spent between 8–13 weeks in North America, Europe, South Africa and elsewhere. That was the life-changing thing, because when they went away in a group that's when they gelled together, because they were encountering things – new people, new cultures, new situations – which they had never encountered before. And our job was to say: 'Look, it's no good you all just looking at these people and cultures as somehow 'strange' or even as the enemy; let's try and understand something about them.' So we've gone more for understanding diversity, and we have noted three aspects to this question of diversity. Firstly, we need to *recognise* difference. It's no good assuming that everybody is the same. Certainly, especially in Northern Ireland, we have all got certain things in common, but we have an awful lot which is different, so it is recognising that there *is* difference, and then moving beyond that. Secondly, we need to *respect* that difference. And thirdly, we need to *value* that difference. The purpose of our bringing people together is *not* to try and wipe out that difference and meld us all into some sameness. Difference is healthy, it's a matter of how it's handled.

I agree. I don't want a society where everybody is grey and there's no arguments, there's no debates; God what a boring bloody place we'd live in. There's got to be differences and diversity; indeed, the more we have the better.

Reconciliation and funders

Not unexpectedly, the topic of reconciliation was linked to that of funding.

I think that the *process* by which funding is allocated is an important element. Let's say that a group of people involved in 'peace and reconciliation' work at community level –leaving aside for the moment the question as to what 'peace and reconciliation' really means – apply to Europe for funding and Europe deem that the work being proposed is worthy of funding support. Europe has to pass that funding through an interim body who in turn establish a set of criteria surrounding how the money is to be used. Now, what is the main purpose of these criteria? Are they there to promote the group's work, or to protect the interim body's financial procedures? Ideally, the criteria should cover both. But the experience of many community groups is that it is the second set of needs – relating to the intermediate body itself – which are paramount. Not only that, but the *assumptions* the people who actually staff the intermediate funding bodies make about community work – even if they have never set foot inside a working-class community in their lives – also determines those criteria. My experience of some of the people sent out by these funding bodies as 'development workers' is that they actually know very little about the community. In fact, I sometimes feel that some of them just aren't living in the same world.

Not only do funders not see the full picture, they often don't recognise the necessary time-frame either. Cross-community work is, by its nature, a long-

term process. Most of us sitting here have been involved in it for over thirty years and none of us could even begin to predict when there might be an end to the need for such work. You would think that intelligent funders would say: right, that looks like a worthwhile and productive project, let's provide it with long-term stability and let's not hinder its efforts with unnecessary bureaucracy or paperwork. But do they do that? Rarely. For a start, they usually provide you with short-term funding. Then they involve you in endless paperwork – and I am convinced that most of the quarterly reports we submit usually end up in a file somewhere and are never read. Funders often add to the burden of your work by insisting that your project becomes overambitious, on the pretext that 'such and such will look better to our committee when they come to make a decision on your funding application'.

I have come to believe that, from most funders' point of view, it's not really about *what* you are doing, or the impact you are making, but whether whatever you are doing allows the funder to tick all the required boxes. If you can tick all the right boxes, then you stand a good chance of getting the money. And the rest is secondary. I also think that there's a word which needs to be taken out of the funding vocabulary, and that's 'innovative'. Every project seems to have to show that it is being 'innovative'. This is something which comes up especially when groups apply for a second tranche of funding, and are told: 'Well, you have to show something different in your approach next time around, be a bit more innovative.' But why? If things are working and bringing results –even if the approach is the same –why is such work suddenly not worthy of support? And how many times have you to be innovative, how many times do you need to change something? I would encourage stepping outside the box, but at the same time there's a need to support programmes which actually have proven their worth, whether or not they are seen as 'innovative' by some funder. And I agree with the comment that there's now an industry out there, in terms of cross-community and reconciliation work, and there are people getting a lot of money and I would question exactly what they are doing with that money – and I don't just mean the intermediate funding bodies but many recipient organisations also.

Sometimes, when you submit an application to one of these 'interim funding bodies', they send out someone to complete a report, which they then bring back to their decision-making board. And as you sit talking to them you get the feeling that you're talking to someone who has *no real idea* about what you're trying to achieve, and yet the basis on which you will be funded, or not funded, will be simply on that person going back and giving their opinion to their board. And I know how the system operates, I've been guilty of this myself in the past. I have sat on such boards, and it's time-consuming work, and it's always tempting, when you have a pile of applications on the table in front of you, to put some aside – without even reading them – because this 'development officer' doesn't recommend them. I remember the surprise on the development worker's face on one occasion when I said: 'No, we'll *not* put those ones to the side, we'll look at them all, and determine *for ourselves* whether we agree with your assessment of them.'

Community groups can get wise to what is going on; they suss out what it is the funders are really looking for, and then tweak their projects to suit the criteria. Even worse, a lot of projects are funding-driven now. There was so much money out there, rather than people saying, 'We have a project; let's see how we can secure funding for it', they were saying, 'Look, there's some money, let's create a project that will tap into it.' The whole process has been turned on its head, and funders don't always see the role they play in that.

Now, I'm not throwing flowers at the International Fund for Ireland, but I have changed my mind about them. I was initially a big critic of the IFI, simply because they weren't doing what I thought they should have been doing back in the early days. But then I realised that what they were doing *was* actually supporting the development of communities, through the creation of jobs and provision of enterprise. And their decision-making process seemed to be much better than that often encountered with other funders. I remember at the start of every board meeting the chairperson would say to us, 'It's you who will make the decisions, nobody else; whatever you decide, IFI will run with it.' And as a result the people sitting there, who brought along their various skills and years of experience, were able to make the funding decisions – not some young professional 'development worker' straight out of college who had never lived anywhere near an interface in their life. For example, IFI came in and supported this place. I mean, a *hotel* on the Springfield Road, right on the interface? Surely only a nutcase would support that? But IFI were in there – and the project was a resounding success, with twenty-seven full and part-time workers. The same with Co-operation Ireland, who came in to support our cross-border work.

They were the same with us in the Suffolk-Lenadoon Interface Group. We had government departments trying to put us off, trying to avoid any commitment to our project. The Department of Social Development [DSD] even said: 'That will never work, you'll never get it off the ground, it's a white elephant.' And IFI came in and put their money on the table –and government was forced to match it. And now those same government departments have done a U-turn. I've been to conferences where people from the DSD talk about our project as one of their models of success –despite the fact that they told us at the beginning that it could never happen, it was impossible.

I honestly think that the way around the problem is for the funding process to be devolved on a regional basis, and only involving people who have a track record in working for their communities, and who understand those communities. They're the people who should be sitting on decision-making boards, and saying: these are the priorities here, and this is what we should put money into in our community. All funding decisions should be undertaken in inclusive consultation with representatives of the community.

Although a number of funding bodies had been invited to participate in the Think Tank discussions, only one took up the offer, and their representative had the unenviable task of responding to the challenging comments being made.

I can appreciate a lot of what is being said here. However, I have to say that when I look broadly at the peace programme I see a great variety and diversity of projects out there which have all secured funding. Now, the criteria used in the funding process might not be to everyone's liking, but to me those criteria are not so divorced from people's needs that they have prevented many good projects from gaining support. Indeed, I believe the opposite has been the case. With regard to the criteria themselves: okay, in the very beginning there was a vagueness about 'peace and reconciliation' programmes, and I admit that there were some projects which had so little to contribute to peace and reconciliation that they should never have been funded in the first place. But funders too try to learn from experience, and the criteria they use evolve accordingly. As we move into Peace III funding things are changing yet again. For example, Co-operation Ireland and a number of other funders have endeavoured to clarify what reconciliation work is about. We have what we call a 'peace framework'. It's not a case of trying to pin groups down to a set of unbending rules, it's more a case of trying to provide some guidelines which say: look, these are the broad criteria we can work within, this is what we are looking for, does your group fit in? We're trying to give people *guidance* as to how their projects can *assist* the process of reconciliation, as opposed to defining what it is.

As for the approach adopted by funders:

Yes, in many ways funders can be criticised for the way we have assessed projects, but each funder works differently and I can only speak in a personal capacity. And whenever I look at an application I don't do so from a distance. I spend time talking to the group... indeed, on many an occasion if I know that a group is thinking about making an application I will go out and talk to them and explore all the relevant issues. And not only that, but if and when a funding package is agreed, that's not the end of my involvement; I like to be there to actively assist the group as their project progresses.

Case history 1: the marching issue
Because the topic under discussion was by its nature rather vague, the opinions voiced ranged widely, sometimes with little obvious focus. For the purpose of this pamphlet, it was felt that the best way to record the diversity of the points made, as well as the complexity of the issues raised, was to show how different projects, undertaken by the participants, had been impacted upon by governmental and funding bodies supposedly working to a 'peace and reconciliation' agenda. The first example concerns efforts by members of the North & West Belfast Parades Forum to secure a peaceful marching season in 2006.

The summer of 2006 was probably the quietest that we have had in the last few years, certainly in terms of North and West Belfast, and more specifically in terms of the parading issue. But I am amazed at the number of organisations and individuals now claiming that they were responsible for that. And that includes statutory bodies like the PSNI. The police commander in North

Belfast attributed the peaceful summer in North Belfast to the work of his officers, quite significantly. He lauded the 'extensive contact' they had made with the community. Now, that just didn't happen at all. That work wasn't done by his officers, it was done by people on the ground. In West Belfast you've had a situation where probably the most senior Republican in West Belfast and the most senior member of the Orange Order in West Belfast sat round a table not once but twelve times, to try and resolve different issues, specifically around the Whiterock parade. There has been a lot of work going on in North Belfast, specifically around Ardoyne, and this year we achieved a situation where two parades did not require *any* determination by the Parades Commission, and no protests by Nationalist residents took place. And that came about because of an understanding between both communities. People have sat down face-to-face, eyeball-to-eyeball, to try and resolve long-standing and deep-seated issues within their community. But as for the organisations which are involved in that, there's only lip-service paid to the work they have done, and they have to scrape around in the dirt to get a bit of funding support to hold meetings, to pay for telephone calls, to pay for postage. Yet at the same time there are other agencies –and not just the police, who I mentioned earlier, but within the community sector – who are presenting themselves as the saviours, because they were the ones who seemingly resolved all these things. And in actual fact they did very little, if anything at all. What I would like to know is: who's measuring these organisations, and did they simply get the money because they can prepare and present a glossy report, and all the figures add up and all the boxes are ticked? Because quite often that's what it seems to be all about.

You know yourself how hard it was to reach such an accommodation during the summer, and that that's not the finish of it –you have to keep working at it. In fact, you will probably have to work even harder because you need to maintain people's motivation and involvement. You literally have to start work *now* to ensure that next year will be just as peaceful. But will funders offer to support you over the coming year? I doubt it very much.

I applaud the efforts you have undoubtedly made on the marching issue, but in many ways it epitomizes for me the whole question of 'reconciliation'. At some level it appears to me that the issue wasn't simply about marching, it was about the *right* to march. And what I don't hear coming from within the Protestant community is a demand, not simply to be able to march, but for people to recognise the *right* to march. And this is coming from somebody who got the shit beat out of him, Sunday after Sunday, in Castle Street, because I wasn't allowed the right to march into my own city, or to have any sort of meeting at the City Hall. To me, the marching issue is a perfect example of what is *not* happening within the debate. For the issue is much bigger than the simple right to march up and down a road.

There *is* actually a debate within the Protestant community around the right to march. One of the interesting things which came out of the report which was drawn up by the community, and which basically kick-started the Parades

Forum, was that it asked more questions about issues *within* the Unionist community than it did about the actual situations which developed at Ardoyne. The Orange Order itself was asked pointed questions. For example: had they the automatic right to march up Twaddell Avenue? People there were saying to the Order, 'You walk up here, youse play a couple of tunes and then youse all piss off, and we're left to pick up the pieces.' And, from a community perspective, people were saying, 'Look, I know it's part of our culture and our heritage and all that, but is it worth the trouble?' So out of that there were challenges thrown to the Orange Order: 'If you are going to do this, then you need to stay here and you need to deal with the consequences, whatever they may be.' But the discussion and debate went even further. People were asking, 'If it is our right to march down the Crumlin Road, is it not equally the right of people in Ardoyne to march down the Crumlin Road? To go to Internment rallies or St Patrick's Day parades?' And, not unexpectedly, there are people within the Unionist community saying, 'No, it's fucking not! I wouldn't have them anywhere near me!' But there's a significant group of people saying, 'Well, I think it is. If we are truly to embrace the concept of shared space then it means shared, in its truest sense: it's not our road, or their road, it's *everybody's* road.' So there *is* that debate, there is a discussion taking place. It may not be at a political leadership level, where it needs to be, but it is happening at the grassroots. And it is significant. We had a group of people who took part in the Ardoyne Fleidh, on a 'Talkback' programme, where representatives from the Unionist community went into Ardoyne and sat on a panel alongside representatives from Ardoyne. Now, that's in the process of being reciprocated. And there's a genuine feeling within the Protestant community that that needs to happen.

I think one of the spin-offs from the establishment of the Parades Forum has been a better understanding within the Protestant community about community development, about how to move forward. If the concept of the Forum was solely about 'Let's get that parade up the Springfield Road, or down the Crumlin Road', I wouldn't be part of it. That's not what it's about for me. It's about enabling a process of greater understanding of who I am and what my community is about. And we're only at the beginning of that awareness-raising process. And it's not one-sided; it's about the Protestant community saying to the Catholic community: 'Well, tell us about your history and your culture.' There's a maturity about it which, frankly, I haven't seen before, but it's now there, there's a willingness to engage. And it has also triggered a questioning *within* the Protestant community. Like: do we really need so many bonfires? Can we turn the whole thing into more of a cultural festival? And, surprisingly, people are moving towards that. They're also starting to air their hopes for the future. The community who live in Ainsworth Avenue and Kirk Street are telling me they don't want that gate there, they don't want the wall there, they want access to that road *all* the time. For them it's not just about getting a parade out one day of the year, it's about sharing that space throughout the year. So there *are* things happening. And it's maybe not happening as fast as everybody would like, but it is now happening.

Yes, I have seen that in other parts of Northern Ireland; I see attitudes changing. I think people are starting to look *beyond* single-issue concerns; I think the debate is increasingly going beyond that, and that's positive.

Case history 2: Farset

The Farset Youth and Community Project began life as a small youth-training programme located on the Crumlin Road. When government introduced its ACE [Action for Community Employment] scheme Farset soon became the largest ACE employer in Belfast, with over 250 workers engaged in a variety of projects, from youth schemes and gardening for pensioners, to training schemes and even an East European Aid project. Not without some hesitancy Farset moved to a location on the Springfield Road, right on one of West Belfast's most troublesome interfaces. There they also established an Enterprise Park. Finally, when government ended the ACE scheme, the idea of building an international hotel right on the interface was pursued and eventually realised. But not without opposition from those they thought should have supported it.

> When we put forward the proposal for this place it was initially rejected by the Belfast European Partnership Board (an intermediary funding body for PeaceI) and hindered by the Department of Social Development who did everything to stop it whilst saying that they supported it. They clearly felt that a hotel wouldn't be feasible in such a notorious location.

> I lost count of the number of times Jackie rang me at all hours of the day and night during the progress of this building to say, 'I've had enough!' And the people we thought would be more helpful put all sorts of obstacles in the way. They even contacted the police, to try and get them to confirm that this was a 'killing' area. But the police didn't oblige.

> When the police informed me that they had been asked whether this would be a dangerous place to open a hotel I asked them what their response had been. And the police officer said, 'Well, I told them that there were more murders going on over in South Belfast than up the Springfield Road.' So fair play to the police – because the police were nervous about a hotel being situated here, as I was too. Indeed, it wasn't until after we got the go-ahead to build it that I started to panic! But we got support from other sources. For example, when Barney McCaughey and Joe Camplisson had to go down to [BEPB offices] to appeal it, they did so with Alex Maskey's support. Alex's attitude was: 'What's wrong with building a hotel on the Springfield Road?'

> I think we need to recognise that one of the positive things was the setting up of UCIT (Ulster Community Investment Trust), which was quite significant, in terms of the social economy.

> Absolutely. Their very existence has aided the development of projects which have engaged people at the grassroots. Indeed, had it not have been for UCIT, this hotel wouldn't have opened. We had only been open for a short

period and I got a phone call from the bank to say that they couldn't sustain our overdraft. And I said, 'What do you mean?' And they said, 'You can't write any more cheques.' Now, we had fourteen people employed at that time, and from both sides of the community! And I'm standing there in total shock and wondering what on earth I was going to do. The only solution seemed to be to close the doors, pay everybody off and brick up the building. And then I remembered the whole thing about UCIT, run by Father Miles. We contacted them and they agreed to support us. Indeed, almost the next day we had a guarantee that a loan would go through, and within three weeks we had £300,000 put into our bank account.

The commercial banks were very happy to provide us with everything we wanted while they knew we were drawing down money from DSD, the Tourist Board, BRO, whoever, and they could see that they were secure and safe. However, the minute we became a business and asked for working capital, like any business, it was a different matter. It was a case of: 'Oh, you're a community project, you're not safe; no way!' To be honest, I don't think we should do business with the banks ever again if we can avoid it.

The endless struggle with government bureaucracy to secure funding for Farset International Hotel would take too long to describe here, but given the current focus on the possible return of the Northern Ireland Assembly, it is worth noting the role civil servants played alongside Assembly Ministers in the past.

We encountered delay after delay. As first we thought that it was our elected Ministers who were holding things up. But a couple of situations revealed that that wasn't the case. We once went to a meeting with Nigel Dodds, in an effort to try and get the process moving. When he saw us come into the room he said: 'Farset? You don't need to tell me about the work of Farset; no problem. Get this project passed.' And the entourage of civil servants who were in the room looked completely taken aback. We couldn't believe it.

Indeed, on the way out of the room I said to the senior civil servant, 'That's great, we'll be able to go ahead now.' And he looked at me and said, 'Don't move too quick; our job is to protect the minister from making mistakes.'

And they got their way: we never got 2d from them at that time! It took a lot more fighting to achieve anything. Similarly, at one time I was blaming Mark Durkan for holding things up, and I got Fred Cobain and Alex Maskey and others to repeatedly badger him. And Cobain was in Farset one day when his mobile rang: it was Mark Durkan, who was insisting, 'Fred, I have no problem with this hotel; I *want* to fund this hotel! How many times have I to tell you! Tell them to start building!' It wasn't Mark Durkan who was stalling things, it was middle-ranking civil servants who were blocking it.

And we couldn't understand why they were blocking it. Our basic argument right was that we were regenerating an interface, we were creating shared space, we were providing jobs for both sides of the community – and out of

all this surely we were building a capacity for peace and reconciliation, call it what you will. All those things was in there and yet they were adamantly against it. Why? Surely that's what government was meant to be encouraging on the ground?

Once the hotel was finally built, the problems didn't stop there.

We put in an application to create another ten jobs for £30,000. This young girl was sent out, and to be honest she hadn't a bloody clue, but her report was instrumental in us being turned down. She said our application didn't comply with the correct 'social economy' criteria!

I'll give you another, somewhat ludicrous, example of outside attitudes. In 2002 Farset International Hotel was nearing completion, and Co-operation Ireland approached us and asked whether they could launch their new peace programme from here. Now, all around the hotel it still looked like a bit of a building site: the car park was still to be completed, and there were ugly hoardings up all around the place. Nevertheless, we decided that we would make an effort to clean the place up and get the building open in time to launch this programme. The clean-up necessitated taking the hoardings away, because they were a bit of an eyesore. Now, a lot of people had been invited, from all sections of the community: Sinn Féin politicians, Unionists, SDLP, ex-paramilitaries from both sides... they were all invited. On the actual night, as I watched them arrive – Loyalist paramilitary leaders, Sinn Féin's Bairbre de Brun... I began to feel more than a bit nervous, and I thought to myself: somebody is going to come in here and start a row, surely such a mixed gathering won't pass off without incident. But as the evening began to wear on and people were seen to be mingling and talking together in a very positive way I began to relax, and realised that something unique was actually happening. Then this guy arrived up – he was part of SEUPB – and he came over to me and said, 'Jackie, would I be right in saying that this place is funded with European money?' 'Yes, it is.' 'Well, I don't see the signs.' And I said to him, 'What do you mean, you don't see the signs?' He said, 'I don't see a sign up which says: "Funded by Europe".' I laughed; I actually thought he was joking. I said, 'Look, the signs *were* up, but they were on hoardings which were taken down just hours ago for the sake of this launch tonight.' And I thought that was the end of it. Then an official from Europe arrived and this SEUPB guy went straight over to him, and although I couldn't hear what was being said, I knew he was informing him about the lack of signs. Within days I got a two-page letter from him saying that Europe could withdraw the grant, on the grounds that we had broken our agreement (to publicly acknowledge their support). Not only that, but he added, 'I have notified the Tourist Board, because the money they put in was also European money; I have also notified BLSP, for the same reasons – and both these organisations will be writing to you.' And, sure enough, I got a two-page letter from the Tourist Board, and a two-page letter from BLSP, saying exactly the same thing: threatening to take the grant away! My initial response was to ring this guy up and say, 'Well, if you want to take it away, you go

ahead; the building's here, do what you want with it!' I mean, I couldn't believe it. That night there was a mixing-bowl here from both communities – political representatives, ex-paramilitaries, community activists and all the rest of it. They were all here to launch a peace programme, on the Springfield Road –which had been one of the worse interfaces throughout the Troubles. But did this clown see all this? Not a bit of it; he didn't give a damn about what was going on *inside* the building, all he was concerned about was that a sign acknowledging Europe wasn't up *outside* the building. That was seemingly his function in life: not to make intuitive assessments on the productive work taking place – right before his very eyes – but to ensure, as was mentioned earlier, that all the right boxes were ticked, and one of those boxes read: have you the appropriate sign up? His overriding criteria wasn't so much concerned with peace and reconciliation, as with ticking the appropriate boxes.

Case history 3: Suffolk-Lenadoon Interface Group

The remarkable story of how people from both sides of another problematic interface came together, as the Stewartstown Road Company, to transform a derelict interface into a *shared space* is not for relating here[†], but some of the lessons learned are pertinent to the topic under discussion.

Any profits made by the Stewartstown Road Company are split in three: a third stays with the company, a third goes to Lenadoon Community Forum and a third comes to Suffolk Community Forum. And we see that as about promoting community sustainability, because with our third of the profits in Suffolk we support groups like the Boys Brigade Company, the After-Schools Club, the football team, the Upper Falls Protestant Boys Flute band, all of the pensioners' groups... all of those groups which help to make a community a community. At the minute we are able to give them maybe only £500 or £600 a year, but that means a lot to them. We reckon that in three or four years' time we could actually be bringing in a substantial income and that is all going to support the numerous small groups inside our communities, as well as a third staying inside the company for future development.

As an outsider, one of the things which struck me about the Suffolk-Lenadoon project was that although in its early days it was met with widespread scepticism and even antagonism, particularly on the Protestant side, when it was finally time to get up at a pubic meeting in Suffolk and explain what was on offer should the joint scheme go ahead, everybody at that meeting, including staunch Loyalists, UDA members and others, said: okay, go ahead with it. And those people hadn't suddenly been converted to 'love their Catholic neighbours', in some gesture of 'peace and reconciliation'; no, they had come to realise that working together was something which was beneficial to their community, and so they were able to set their fears and antagonisms about the 'other' community aside and embrace the project. As the project

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† A detailed account of this project is given in Island Pamphlet No. 81, *Building bridges at the grassroots*. It is available as a free download from http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/islandpublications/

develops and shows its worth, that in itself will do more to undermine suspicion and old hatreds than any amount of so-called 'peace' work.

In our inter-community work between Suffolk and Lenadoon one of the main issues at the beginning was the actual language used. Everybody now looks at our work and talks about it as being a role model of 'peace and reconciliation'. Yet, if we had initially tried to present it to our communities –particularly within Suffolk –as being about 'peace' we'd have been laughed out of the place. We had to sell it as an economic regeneration project, with the words 'cross-community' used very tentatively – and the words 'peace and reconciliation' not used at all. Indeed, for a while we lost a lot of potential members of Suffolk Community Forum because these people thought that if they came onto the Forum they would be expected to sit down with 'them'uns across the road'. So we had to say to people that we would not ask anybody to do anything that they would not feel comfortable with. There are people in our community who will *never* want to sit face-to-face with anybody from Lenadoon and we have to respect their desire not to do that. But equally, the people who *want* to do it, and are willing to do it, should be able to do so without having to look over their backs all the time in their own community. Because there has been a legacy of fear of their own side. Thankfully, within the Loyalist paramilitary leadership there's now more progressive thinking going on, and hopefully that will bring a change in attitudes.

You're absolutely right about the language. The imposition of a 'peace and reconciliation' rationale onto your project would have destroyed it before it got anywhere. And yet, having succeeded in creating something which has brought economic regeneration to your area and a marked improvement to the social environment, this will undoubtedly assist in moves *towards* 'peace and reconciliation'.

With the Suffolk-Lenadoon Interface Group, we have in our vision statement for the next ten years that we want to live side by side as good neighbours – that's it. We recognise that you can only take reconciliation so far. In a community like ours we will never be living in integrated housing, certainly not in my lifetime. As I said, I don't even like the term 'reconciliation'; I don't like the language that's used around peace-building, I think it's very unhelpful, and there's a lot of very negative connotations around it. I have been hearing recently, but particularly within the Protestant community, that a lot of people feel they are being pushed too far, too fast, and I think that's a big concern and it's certainly one of our concerns that we've had to fight against over the years. We're only a tiny community in Suffolk – we're about 850 people surrounded by tens of thousands of Nationalists. If you're a resident of Suffolk, then no matter where you stand in the estate you can see an interface, on every side. So fears of the 'other' community will remain for some time. And when trying to build good relations with the Catholic communities around us, I know that it's very hard sometimes for them to understand why we won't move at a pace that matches theirs. I know they get frustrated, because they think that we are just digging our heels in, and as far

as they are concerned sure everything which went before is all in the past now, so what are we worried about?

I think that a lot of the best work is the work that's done quietly behind the scenes, and publicity is often highly detrimental. As already said, Suffolk estate is a tiny enclave of Protestants surrounded by Catholic housing estates. We made a conscious decision that we wouldn't have an official launch of the project because in doing so you would have to invite the local MP, who in our case is Gerry Adams. And the Suffolk community just wouldn't buy that in any form. However, *without consulting us*, one of our (initially reluctant) funders, BRO, sent some people up onto the site – we are extending the original project into its second phase – along with some of their PR guys. And they then informed us that they were going to have this huge launch, in a blaze of publicity, around the fact that they were putting capital funding into Phase II. And they were inviting a government minister up, and no doubt would issue an invitation to Gerry Adams, as well as to the local MLAs. We wrote and told them that while we recognised that Gerry Adams was the elected representative for West Belfast, you wouldn't invite him to launch a project in the heart of the Shankill Road, and such a move would be equally unacceptable to the people of Suffolk. We further informed them that if they decided to proceed with this, the Suffolk Directors of the project would either boycott the launch or walk off the site on the actual day. We told them, 'You lot will come up here, have all your photo-opportunities and publicity and then go home, and we will be the people who will have to go into the community and face the consequences; and we are not prepared to do that.' And they were absolutely furious that we were making such a 'fuss'. And from what I heard recently it seems that they intend to push ahead with their launch. They have no understanding of grassroots realities. Either that, or such realities are secondary to their own organisational needs.

But positive changes are already being evidenced on the ground.

In Suffolk estate at the end of July there was a crowd came over from the Catholic side of Blacks Road and smashed windows, damaged cars, etc. – completely out of the blue. And a well-known member of the DUP came out and met with a group of residents who had had their homes attacked, and our interface worker was there. And the people in the estate said to her, 'What are you going to do about it? When are you going to sit with Sinn Féin and get all this sorted out? *Are* you going to sit with Sinn Féin?' 'Oh, no, no, no!' 'Well, that's alright; if you're not going to do it, we'll do it ourselves.' And they went ahead through our interface worker and arranged a meeting with the local Sinn Féin and got the whole thing sorted. Now, that has never happened before, when a group of ordinary people have actually said, 'Well, if you're not going to do it, we will. It's about time you got off your backsides, and sit down with these people to get these issues sorted out. And if you are not going to do it, we'll do it ourselves.' And I think that's a huge step forwards, that ordinary people are making such decisions for themselves.

We've had a real struggle over the years doing what we were doing, and watching our backs from our own community as we did so. Indeed, most of the opposition that we've had to the work that we've been doing has come from within our own community, and we know that there are still elements, maybe decreasing elements, within our community who don't like the stuff that we're doing. Nevertheless, I find now – particularly over the past two years – that a lot of groups from other areas of Belfast, particularly small Protestant communities, are actually coming to see us, some of them very quietly, and saying, 'How have you gone about all this?' We had a guy came in about six months ago, from a very hard-line Loyalist background, and he said, 'I had no idea that youse had actually done this; how did you do it? What were the steps that you went through; what were the lessons you learnt? If I was trying to do something like this within my community, how would I sell it to those people who don't think I should be doing it?'

I think that those people recognise that they are going to have to face a struggle within their own community to be able to do this type of work, and there's a kind of process that you have to go through. And I think that people looking in from the outside – funders included – don't always understand the kinds of internal pressures many community groups work under. They just see a nice project, they don't see the struggle you might have had to establish that project and maintain the community's support for it.

Case history 4: Cross-border work
Another example was the work undertaken by the Farset/Inishowen & Border Counties Initiative.

My experience is that in the work we do it takes years for the benefits to come through. But it invariably does. In Inishowen we work with people from very disadvantaged backgrounds and we have seen a lot of them coming through now as the new leaders. They have built up their confidence. It's hard work but it does pay off, even if it takes a few years for the results to show. We also see more groups prepared to interact with one another. We have seen many friendships growing as a result of all the cross-border contacts, and that's where the real reconciliation takes place.

I found that the main concern with many community groups in the South was basic survival: how could they exist on very little money? Religion or identity never emerged as a pressing issue. Perhaps it was never addressed in the way it needed to be. But because the funders insisted on the reconciliation aspect, we decided that the way we would tackle it would not be to address issues head on, but indirectly. For example, as part of our programme we took people to the First World War battlefields in Belgium and France, and out of that came unbelievable learning experiences. We explored how the 36th (Ulster) and 16th (Irish) Divisions came together at the Battle of Messines; and, indeed, had fought and died there side by side. And then we discussed the futility of war itself, and when people visit the vast cemeteries around the

Somme and elsewhere, that's the one thing which impacts on everyone: the terrible tragedy and futility of war. That then automatically translates into our own situation: the futility of *all* conflict. And when I later follow up groups on monitoring visits they often say, 'Because of our shared visit to those battlefields we now understand the tragedy of our own situation better.' I have seen the nearest thing to miracles happening out there with people from very different persuasions, who have build up lasting friendships and readily accepted their differences.

It's about creating opportunities to engage in things which don't threaten one another. When we first set up the Farset/Inishowen project we were uncertain whether people would avail of the funding, so we kept the criteria very flexible. Literally all groups had to do was come over the border, take one look at one another and then go away and do their own thing. But we found that the problem was the opposite: the groups came back for more funding applications because they wanted to meet with each other again and again, from all sides. And in their contacts they started to demolish the myths they had held about each other. And through that contact friendships began to grow. I'll give you one example of that. During recent violence on the Shankill Road, between Protestants and the police, two women came in to my office in Donegal and asked, 'What about our friends on the Shankill?' And I replied, 'They're fine; I was talking to them on the phone this morning.' And the two women said, 'If they want to come down here we'll look after them until things settle down.' And those two women were genuinely concerned about people on the Shankill, especially the friends that they had made there. Now, for years before that they would have said, 'Awh, it's that crowd up there in Belfast, they're at it again; they're all mad.' And they wouldn't have been all that concerned about them. But now there is a concern for the people who live in the areas that we work with in the North, certainly in Belfast, and in a genuine way. They met these people, realised that they were decent people and now want to help them if they can. We also have many people going across the border to weddings, wakes and for other activities. And with many of our groups – most members of which had never been across the border before –the problem now is often getting them to come back again!

People from the Limerick Peace Group came to us once and talked about marching up the Shankill Road with Tricolours and all sorts of things. I said, 'Do you need your head examined! It's too soon to start things like that.' But over a period of time we got in contact with people in Drogheda, and we have taken people down there. Now, we didn't take the easy option, we took some right-wing 'Hell and Damnation' types down and it was strictly honest and blunt and up-front. And we looked at issues like housing; we had a conference in Dublin where Shinners were there, under a different guise, and all sorts of people from here, DUP were there under different guises. But people were honest with one another, and that's the way it should be.

The only people who are going to effect change are those directly experiencing the problems, that's the bottom line; whether in a Protestant area, a Catholic

area, or across the border in the Republic. Things have come a long way since we started this. The thing is all about enhancing the capacity to engage with one another, and I think that has significantly increased. A lot of good stuff has been done, although people don't always realise the effort it took to get there at times. I don't get overly fussed about 'reconciliation'; as far as I am concerned, if needs are being addressed then other things will fall into place, including a dialogue on cultural and other issues. Look at what has come out of the World War One remembrance and understanding, the change in mindsets which has been encouraged because of all that.

In the war remembrance activities any sort of imposed reconciliation ethos would be totally unacceptable – and unnecessary. We don't set out and say, 'We're going to bring people out to the Peace Park [at Messines] and do reconciliation with them.' No, it's about education, it's about creating awareness. And, as a *result* of that new awareness, people invariably come away from the Peace Park with a completely different attitude towards each other.

A cultural diversion!

While on the subject of history and culture, an interesting and totally unplanned-for debate itself took place within the Think Tank discussions.

One of our interface workers once commented that most Protestants knew very little about the broader issues. So we brought in Community Dialogue to run a course on 'Conflict and Diversity: what does it mean for Loyalists?' And we got funding for that and those who are doing it are saying that it is very, very challenging, especially for those who have always had a particular mindset. And it's all about realising that you can have confidence in your own identity, and confidence in what you believe yourself, while still being willing to listen to the other side of the story, and respect other people's perspectives and views. It doesn't actually mean having to weaken down or compromise on things that are important to you.

Your example aside, I feel that the search for identity within the Protestant community has largely stopped. When I ask people from the Protestant community about their identity they simply say 'I am British'. And when I then ask what 'British' means, no-one can tell me in any real depth. I once organised the *Northern Lights Festal* in Ballycastle and Bushmills, to provide an opportunity for both communities to come together on an annual basis and share their sense of identity. And we had debates and discussions. But even when we had workshops we could not draw out this sense of Britishness, so I still don't know what it really means.

When you talk about trying to draw out what 'Britishness' means I don't hear you say the equivalent about Irishness. I fail to see why people's Britishness gets questioned where I would never dream of questioning Republicans' or Nationalists' Irishness.

The basic problem for me is the Protestant sense of identity, because until we

determine what that is then people are not going to be able to feel confident in themselves. Certainly, I question my Irish identity, but at least I have criteria which allows me to establish that there *is* a sense of cultural, historical identity: for example, in language, in music, in dance, in sport or in a whole range of different elements. But I don't see that sense of identity within those who profess a British identity.

But why not? You've just check-listed some of the reasons why I feel British: sport, music, language, culture, the newspapers I read. I can't understand why those of an Irish culture feel they have the right to question my Britishness.

I was involved in a programme where people from my community met with Shinners and people who had been in the H-Blocks. We actually spent a whole weekend with people who were totally steeped in Irish nationalism; indeed, they had spent years in prison because they fought for a United Ireland. And we said to them, 'Right, you're telling us that you want a United Ireland. Okay, you have a captive audience, tell us what there is for us in this United Ireland that you have fought for and spent years in prison for; tell us what the benefits are for us of being in this utopia of yours.' And they couldn't give us an answer, they weren't able to tell us what the benefits would be of changing the state we had now. They knew it as an ideal, they felt it was something tangible, but beyond that it proved illusory.

I don't feel either British or Irish, and I have no religion; I don't feel the need for *any* of these things. My identity is an international one.

Until we determine our sense of identity, which I think is crucial, we are not going to be able to engage with one another.

But why not? It's only important if it's crucial to *you*. I have a very strong sense of my identity and it's not about being either Irish or British. I am a practising Christian and that is my identity, but it is not centred around Protestantism or Catholicism because I don't believe in those two labels either, just the fact that I am a Christian. I feel secure in my identity but I don't understand why it is so important that that identity has to be either British or Irish.

A manufactured goal?
Although the discussants never looked as if they would ever reach an agreed definition of what 'peace and reconciliation' was all about, some of them wondered whether we should even be discussing it at all, believing that the very concept had been imposed on our work, and represented a false goal.

I accept all the points that have been made. However, I feel there is something missing in our discussions. Government and funders not only talk about 'peace and reconciliation', they imply that we lived in peace prior to the outbreak of the Troubles. But what kind of 'peace' was it, when Catholics were discriminated against, when both working-class communities were

exploited, ignored and were made to suffer disadvantage and deprivation? And, even if the politically-inspired violence is removed for good, will it really be peace if the Catholic community feels it can reverse roles and dictate *its* agenda to the Protestant community? The whole thing has never been defined at any level which makes sense to me. To be honest, I don't want peace if I *don't know what it means*. Now, I know the sort of *society* I want, and that society will have conflict in it, and that conflict will be positive and developmental and will encourage people to feel that they have a real stake in their society.

In the 1970s there was a quite different debate going on. Despite the horrors that we were inflicting on one another, individuals from both communities were starting to engage in creative debate. And although they wanted peace they were not motivated by some nebulous concept of 'peace and reconciliation'; they were searching for radical alternatives to those aspects of our society which were oppressing us all. We sought to empower our communities, and in that way we might also achieve an end to the conflict. And there was a definite energy there, and a real sense of hope. But now? I talk to people on the ground, particular in Protestant communities, and they are so low in terms of their sense of being, where they are going, where they are; who feel they can do nothing, that they have no power, that they can't confront those few people who are controlling their communities. And despite a massive injection of funding –indeed, perhaps *because* of it – our communities feel more disempowered than ever. And what is the focus of most of the work going on at community level today? Changing this society? Creating radical alternatives to fight exploitation? No. Our energies have been channelled almost exclusively into 'peace and reconciliation' projects!

What I would like to know is how, and when, this concept of 'reconciliation' – as a response to our communal problems – emerged. Now, that might seem an odd question, for wasn't it always there? But when the Troubles started not only community activists but government viewed the solution quite differently. Government responded to the escalating violence by setting up the Community Relations Commission – not to be confused with the current Community Relations Council. And the *First Annual Report* of the Commission,published in 1971, is laced throughout with a strong community development linkage. Let me quote from parts of it. It states that 'community relations depend upon unimpeded economic development and a reliable sense of security'; it is concerned with 'those who suffer deprivations through lack of employment, poor housing or inadequate amenities'; it talks about 'the relevance of community development as a strategy for community relations'. It points the finger squarely at governmental institutions, stating, 'the responsibility for the improvement of community relations must be seen to be a central and continuing responsibility for every department of government.' It takes an even more radical step when it calls for 'the formation of local community councils' to represent the community and encourage 'participation of the citizen'. Now, such an unambiguous linkage between community

development and community relations is largely absent today, especially on the part of most funders. Certainly, the current Community Relations Council would find most of the above quotes quite alien to its own approach. Why did such a strong change of emphasis come about? And when? *Who* brought it about, and to whose benefit was it? And why, and how, did we at grassroots level change to accommodate the new perception? For the reality is that we're now stuck with a concept which *we didn't start out with*, but yet if we don't adhere to it, we can soon find ourselves outside the funding loop.

But even to take that concept of 'community development'. People have been using the term for years –not just the funders but ourselves – and yet nobody has ever been able to tell me *what* it is we are developing towards. What does it mean? *Where* is 'community development' taking us? What is its purpose? To empower communities? Or to make those communities compliant with government policies and directives? When the Provisionals emerged they had at least their Eire Nua programme, an attempt to build something new, which talked about co-ops, talked about *who owns* our community – and that attracted me. And I began to work within that framework and sought to create alternative structures within my own area: a co-op food market, a credit union, we held our own community elections.... But what I didn't know at the time was that major players within the Republican movement were actually undermining this type of work. They had no sense of the importance of ownership or control by the community. To them it was a distraction from the 'armed struggle'. Because they – just like the bureaucrats in government – could not believe that the community itself could begin to exercise some sort of power, democratically. They could not accept that we needed the sort of structures where we didn't have to beg for funding, but funding was ours as of right, because the businesses which operated in our areas – and, in the case of the banks, made massive profits – had an obligation to put back something into the community. I had this great belief that we were on the road to something radical, but that all ended. Now, I just feel that government, including Europe, has taken over *every* aspect of development within our communities and they control it largely through the allocation of funding. But I have heard nobody saying: let's begin to address the issue of funding in different ways. Let's confront the banks, let's own the off-licences so that we can put a charge on where that money is going... there is a range of things we can do. But I am not hearing that debate.

Within Suffolk I think those are the sort of things we're now looking at. The builders are coming on site in another fortnight to begin the next phase, which will be the provision of a 50-space child-care facility. Now, we had private agencies tripping over themselves to come in and take over the lease of our new child-care centre, but instead we formed a locally-owned child-care company so that local people will own it and manage it and get the profits out of it. Also, there's derelict houses in our estate which were sold off by the Housing Executive to private developers, who have just let them go to ruin, some of them are only fit to be demolished. We are now investigating

ways that we as a community can actually buy those houses back, so that we can control who goes into them and get the profits, which we could then plough back into the area, with a view to longer-term community sustainability.

Is 'peace' simply the absence of violence? Youth alienation, drugs, increasing incidence of suicide, long-term unemployment... is *that* peace?

It is becoming ever clearer to me that 'reconciliation' is a non-starter. I would totally agree with the notion that we have to concentrate on the *type* of society we want. And the search for a society which provides a healthy environment, which looks after all its citizens, and provides jobs and opportunities to young people –all those things – that's far more important, and more relevant, to me than any talk about 'reconciliation'.

We have allowed others not only to define, but to dictate, what it is we are about. Because we needed funding support, and because most funding was dependent on a commitment to 'peace and reconciliation', not only have we become subservient to that agenda, but *we too* have also started to accept its legitimacy. And even though many people working at the grassroots criticise the funding agenda, we still work very much within it.

One of the reasons that any radical edge among community activists was dulled was that when we sought resources to promote our work we were forced, bit by bit, to water down all those things we believed in so that we could access those resources, until eventually we lost that radicalism. And often it was simple everyday concerns which distracted us from our vision. I'll give you an example. In the Woodvale area at the beginning of the Troubles many of those who came together as vigilantes – myself, Louis West, Tommy Aiken and people like that –also began to get involved in community work. And we tackled housing issues, youth-related issues, and many others. So much was going on – and a lot of the meetings were held in my house – that we decided that what we needed was a community centre. So we formed Ainsworth Community Association, fought to obtain funding and eventually we got our community centre. But what did we find then? That we needed to constantly run functions in it so that we could pay the electric bills and so on! And all the energies we had previously put into community development and all the agitation we had been doing around housing issues, the environment, trying to get training programmes for young people, and all the rest of it, were now increasingly channelled into running bingo sessions, or standing at the door to run a disco to bring in a few quid, so that we could keep the community centre open.... It was this never-ending cycle, and outside of that cycle were all the things we had hoped to be doing but now didn't have the time for.

The politicians and the status quo
There was also disquiet expressed at the fact that the 'reconciliation' agenda was primarily focused on the two working-class communities.

Government and funders focus reconciliation efforts on the grassroots: to them it's apparently a community problem, not an establishment problem. Now, anyone who has ever been in receipt of CRC funding knows that at the end of each year you are sent a multi-page form to fill in, with questions like: how many Protestants was your project involved with, how many Catholics? How many were males and how many were females? What age groups were they? Etc. But politicians, civil servants, professional people in the statutory bodies, are *never* asked such questions. And yet it might be a good idea, before an MLA can draw his or her salary, to give them a questionnaire asking: how many Catholics/Protestants did you sit down with during the past year? How many members of the DUP/Sinn Féin did you attempt to engage in dialogue? It's as if the establishment is saying that the problems are *only* located within the working class, that the need for 'peace and reconciliation' is basically a grassroots problem. And yet the very people who do their utmost – whether by design or simple intransigence – to destroy what is being attempted at the grassroots are absolved of any accountability. There is certainly no 'reconciliation'-type criteria attached to *their* job descriptions.

Whenever that 15-year-old Catholic boy, Michael McIlveen, was beaten to death by a gang in Ballymena, certain well-known DUP politicians and Orange leaders came out publicly with strong condemnations. But where did the gang members who beat the boy to death get their sectarianism from? From their community's role models. And who were these role models? People like those same politicians and Orange leaders – and their counterparts on the 'other' side. These people cannot act for decades as bad role models and then wash their hands off that legacy – that's just hypocrisy.

Take the churches and the way they have colluded in the educational segregation of children and young people – the most formative years of their lives. And after they come out of the school system divided from one another, we then have to spend masses of money on reconciliation work trying to bring them together!

When you talk about reconciling views, whose views are we talking about? Are we bringing Catholics and Protestants together? Surely true Protestants and true Catholics shouldn't hate each other anyway: to put it in religious terms, they should already be reconciled through the Cross. So do we mean that Unionists and Nationalists have to be reconciled? But why do they need to be reconciled? Nobody is pushing for Labour and Conservatives in the rest of the UK to be 'reconciled'. So we have to identify what it is we are talking about. People talk of reconciling differences. But which differences? Between those with access to opportunity and those who are deprived of such access? Can you see the CRC being willing to support an application which sought to address the class divide! Everybody talks about bringing people together from the Shankill and Falls Roads. The establishment would throw its hands up in horror if you suggested that we'd be better looking at the divide between the Shankill/Falls and the Malone Road/Cultra!

Government is crafty. Instead of us focusing on disadvantage and deprivation – the real causes of most discontent – we are encouraged to focus on superficial things: they are happy to see us get people to sit down together over a cup of tea, or to release white doves on the Falls Road and Shankill Road. But, we know that that's not what it's about, indeed, that's a distraction from the real issues: unemployment, housing, poor school results, etc.

My personal opinion is that academic selection is nothing short of educational child abuse. The Shankill has the highest level of educational underachievement in this Province, probably in Ireland, and quite possibly in the whole of the United Kingdom. Now, I don't hear political representatives saying: we need to do something about this. On the contrary, the concern of the two main Unionist parties is with reinforcing the status quo. Jackie Hewitt, Jackie Redpath, Michael McClelland and myself went down to [the BELB's offices in] Academy Street in 1979 and said that there were young people coming out of the schools in Belfast who couldn't read and write. And the Chief Executive just laughed at us: 'There's no young person leaving school in this city who can't read and write!' But we were proven right. Now, is that not a more pressing, and more relevant, issue than 'peace & reconciliation'?

What of the future?
So, what did the Think Tank participants think could, or should, be done about all of this?

What concerns me now with the incredible rise in property prices, is that people with enough money can radically change our areas, even destroy them. Developers can walk into any community and change that community forever with their money, just by buying people out. They turn the property they have bought into rented accommodation, in order to bring in a bigger profit, and young families, who traditionally would have moved into such houses, are forced out of the area because there is no way that they could afford the prices. These developers stayed out of it all these years, came nowhere near us, offered us no help whatsoever. And even though we struggled for years in our communities to try and bring about peace and a better environment, even to help the community survive, we now find that these outsiders with their money can change things almost overnight should they so wish. We need to find a way of having a veto over the developers, or some mechanism whereby each community can have a genuine say in its future. I think that it's of vital importance that we do that. One of the things I like about the Suffolk experience is that you weren't concerned with 'peace and reconciliation', you were concerned with the basics of community life: housing, a sense of belonging, a sense of ownership, and you stuck to that. Ironically, by focusing on the basics you stand a far better chance of promoting *lasting* peace and reconciliation than the horde of 'P&R' projects out there at the moment. People's attitudes will change with their environment, their security and their jobs, housing, health and all the rest of it... their attitudes will change, I'm convinced of that.

One of the positive developments which has occurred in recent years is the idea of 'community conventions'. The idea of holding a convention is basically to hear the voice of the people, either as individuals or as representatives of community groups. And that's what we did for the Shankill Convention, and we had some brilliant discussions. Alongside the first Shankill Convention we organised a Community Exhibition in the Spectrum Centre where we provided 100 stalls. And we invited local groups to each take one of these stalls for three days and promote what they were doing –whether through photographs, documents, or whatever – so that the community could come in and see all that was going on in the area. And I was amazed, those 100 stalls were quickly snapped up, and we could have done with more. Even I was surprised by the sheer amount of work going on behind the scenes on the Shankill. And then when we brought members of these groups into discussions during the actual Convention, they left their politics at the door and were able to discuss all the issues impacting upon the Shankill. In fact, there were no politicians at the first Convention. We wanted to encourage a situation where the community would begin to *tell the politicians* what their needs are, rather than the other way round. Formerly, if a decree came out from government nobody reacted until they heard what their particular political leader thought of it, and then that became their belief, and they followed like sheep. We wanted that process reversed. And on the Shankill itself we succeeded in uniting people there on ways to move the community forward.

What is it that we are all about? To me, it's about a whole range of things, but reconciliation is not necessarily the primary one. It's about people and about conflict, and about addressing conflict. It is vital that the legacy of our conflict is addressed, and that different mechanisms are put in place to help break down barriers and get people to sit down and look seriously at their situation. Now, that talking can be done independently of each other, or jointly when people feel ready to engage. And it should be done on a cross-border basis too, because the conflict has affected the whole of the island of Ireland, especially in the border counties, where investors have shied away because of the proximity of the conflict. And it's not rocket-science stuff, it's about people sitting together and getting to know where we each are. And we must try to learn from the past, but in an honest and open way, not one which attempts to glorify that past. For if we can learn from the past I think we will move forward in a stronger, more informed way. For there is a common enemy and that is violence and the myths that prevail around it. And it's a slow process. You can't expect to bring two groups together and say, or expect, that we'll have reconciliation now: that's a recipe for total disaster.

The real sufferers were the working-class people; it was in their communities that the hardship was felt the most, and those communities became even more marginalised than they had been. However, the other hard reality is that the only ones who are going to sort out the situation are the people in those communities themselves. If they are depending on some outside agency to come in to do it, whether the political establishment or professional bodies,

then they will have a long, long wait. So it is important that the capacity of the people in those communities is built up, so that they have the courage and the confidence to even think about doing something about it. There's two ways of building capacity. There's single-identity stuff. It's very hard to put people from two sides around a table if they each haven't had some capacity and confidence built within themselves to be able to deal with the wider issues. And after the single-identity work comes the collective engagement. It's about truthful exchange from each side, and when it all comes out you'll find that there's more held in common than in difference. And the common issues are in everyday life: health, housing, education, money, existence, the simple basic things. And as these begin to be dealt with and trust builds up, then the other things will hopefully be dealt with too.

Although many people, on an individual basis, are certainly able to work towards reconciliation, I am not convinced that our two communities in general will come anywhere near reconciliation for a long time yet, for the simple reason that neither side has even begun to analyse, let alone acknowledge, the *nature* of the war that went on. I recently heard Loyalists talk proudly of having 'taken the war to the IRA', when in reality hundreds of innocent Catholics suffered in the process. Similarly with Republicans: I have heard them portray their 'armed struggle' as some pure and lofty war of national liberation, ignoring the brutal and inhumane affair it actually was. Those who suffered directly know only too well what the reality of the conflict was. But very few of those who took part as combatants, and those who gave them their unquestioning support, have really begun to analyse the *nature* of the 'war' and what it did to this society. Until that happens I cannot really see how we can move to a genuine reconciliation.

I think the big difficulty that we're in at present is that not only have we not really analysed the war we have been through, but we haven't analysed the peace, or the post-conflict situation, and what's actually happening there. No community stands still: they are either on the way up or the way down. And even more important is whether they *feel* they are on the way up or down. I think the trajectory of communities in Belfast has changed very dramatically over the last fifteen years or so, whereby in Catholic West Belfast – notwithstanding the problems associated with life in Ballymurphy or Lenadoon or wherever – there seems to be a community there who is perceived, and perceives itself, to be going somewhere. I'm not sure that they know just where they are going, but they are on the move somewhere. And there's energy there and some sort of self-belief. But take somewhere like the Shankill, which, despite once believing itself to be the 'heart of the Empire', now feels it is on the beaten side. People wouldn't say that very loud, but they do say it – that it's on the way down. And those two things aren't healthy if we can't understand what's happening and connect them. We're going to have a switch-over of victim mentality from the people who used to feel they were victims to the people who *now* feel they are victims, and that isn't healthy; the only healthy thing is both communities feeling healthy about themselves and each other.

I am optimistic. My grandchildren attend an integrated school and at a parents' evening the principal was telling the story that they once had a policy that Rangers and Celtic tops were not allowed to be worn during PE, because of the connotations attached to them. They also have class councils where the children get together and meet with the teachers once a month and put forward their own views. And at one of these councils the children said to the teachers that they thought that they should be allowed to start wearing Rangers and Celtic tops for PE, because those were the things that were important to them, and, as this was an integrated school where they were supposed to respect each other and acknowledge differences, they considered the existing policy silly. So the teachers talked it through with them and agreed that they could start wearing their Rangers and Celtic tops for PE. However, the pupils themselves put, as a kind of an add-on, that they should only wear them on school grounds, and when outside the school grounds they should wear jumpers or blazers over their tops, because adults out there wouldn't necessarily understand these things as well as they did. And to me that spoke volumes: that those kids were recognising that they could accept each other, and negotiated to be able to do so in their own ways.

If you had gender balance at decision-making levels things would be better.

Over the years many individuals, many groups, have worked – directly and indirectly – to bring about peace and reconciliation between the two communities. And most of the time, certainly at the beginning, they did so without massive funding. Many initiatives existed on a hand-to-mouth basis.

There are people out there determining: this is the definition of community relations, this is the definition of reconciliation, this is the definition of peace. But who are these people? And have their definitions any relevance to people on the ground? For the people who live in Twadell Avenue and the people who live in Brampton Park 'peace' means that they don't get their windows put in, that they can walk across the road to the shop to get a pint of milk and don't get abused, that they can take their child to school without any problem, that they don't have to keep waking up at four o'clock in the morning to look out their bedroom window to check that their car hasn't been vandalised. We need to get to a point where people are listening to what Joe Public is saying, not what government ministers or the Chief Executive of CRC and other similar bodies are saying.

Take the Northern Ireland budget from Westminster; there's more money that is handed *back* to the Exchequer *unspent* by departments than there is that comes in here under the entire Peace programme – all the funders from the IFI, Co-operation Ireland, you name it. All that money doesn't come anywhere near the amount of money that is handed back to the Exchequer.

We can go back into history and all the different failures and all the ways we have been manipulated as a community. But I don't want to find myself sitting here next year and talking about how, in 2007, we were again led up

the garden path. So is there anything we can do now? How do we go forward into Peace III? What impact can we make – if any – on determining the criteria which has been presumably already been laid down? How do we proceed to raise issues such as those raised during these discussions?

The nub of the problem will be when this peace money runs out – some say in six years' time: where will we go from here? I'm not saying you need a lot of money but you need to have some finance to turn the thing around.

There seems to be an acceptance that when peace money runs out we all stop working. Now, as far as I can see, when peace money runs out that's when a lot of the real stuff that's going on will be kicking in. Because in the days when we started to develop our own communities and try to build capacity we didn't call it 'capacity-building' then, we didn't use words like 'inclusion' – we just knew the bloody place was in a mess and so we decided to do something about it. We hadn't 2d. But we were determined that we would do something for the community. That volunteering desire to do things, on both sides of the community, was there. I remember in the early days we used to talk, we engaged, we explored different issues, and discussed how we might deal with them. The problem was that when the money was introduced the whole programme of peace became so redefined that it was above what people were doing in the communities. And the voluntary sector no longer exists, it has disappeared, been destroyed.

Maybe it is only when funding stops that the community, or those groups working within the community, will begin to ask the questions that we now should be asking: how are we going to sustain whatever is happening, how are we going to bring about change?

The funder present asked a very pertinent question:

Now, peace money has been here for ten years. Has it made a difference to reconciliation? Or would what has happened have happened anyway?

Am I living in a different world here? Look at the last election results. Do people not realise who will be actually confronting one another in the new Assembly! Sinn Féin and the DUP! And we are asking did the money make a difference? As far as I can see it made no bloody difference whatsoever! Sectarianism is more endemic in our communities than it ever was.

I personally think it *has* made a difference. There's things which have happened because of the money and they definitely wouldn't have happened otherwise. Indeed, we [Farset/Inishowen Initiative] wouldn't be here today but for the money. Those of us who have been in the middle of it know that without a doubt the money has made an impact and it has allowed purposeful structures to be put in place. However, it's very difficult to quantify the impact. The 'numbers game' does not reflect the good work that has been going on behind the scenes. Positive things have happened that would never have happened but for the funding, but the reality is that we had 30 years of

brutal conflict and it is going to take a minimum of 60 more years to properly address that damage. The last ten years we have made great strides, though. So yes, without the money we certainly wouldn't be where we are now.

I'm not sure that all the positive things you see around us are directly related to the money. On the contrary, I think we have lost something as a consequence of the massive input of funding – because of the strings attached, and the status quo mindset of those who controlled that funding. The potential which was there in the '70s to radically change this society has been dissipated and destroyed. I believe that many of the creative things people are currently doing would have happened anyway. Ordinary people would have had the sense to come together and do such things, because when faced with so much killing they would have eventually said: look, we must rise above this.

I totally agree. Had we not got the money, we would have continued to do what we were doing then, and, as you said, the results today might have been far more radical. Anyway, that money was not really pumped in here simply to promote 'peace and reconciliation' – and I'm not denigrating our funder present – it was given to *control* what was happening here at the grassroots. It has been used to continually thwart any radical efforts by the community to empower itself. It has also helped to create a massive professional community sector worth millions, which is quite happy to deal with *consequence*, but has no intention of ever dealing with *cause*. To be honest, at the end of those six years I am hoping that there will be *no* more money, and we will be forced to say: where are we going?

But there were people within the community in receipt of funding who *were* pushing at the boundaries of the criteria; they were stretching the funders to the limit. The Springfield Road is but one example. If you take all the community initiatives along the Springfield Road: the 'Top of the Rock' project, the Enterprise Park, Farset, the International Hotel and others... Okay, there's a lot could still be done, but before those different projects happened there was complete dereliction, there was total polarisation. Even when the Enterprise Park was built people said to us: 'What did you build that for; it won't do any good?' Indeed, at first nobody would even go into it, because people were afraid to go anywhere near the Springfield Road. Now both communities are working in the Enterprise Park, they work at the Top of the Rock, they work down here in the Hotel and in the Business Centre and all the rest of it. Now, that is a step forward which can be measured because of peace money. Is it taking us any further forward than where we were in the late '60s? Maybe not, but then we were well advanced in the late '60s. The problem is how much we *retreated* from all the gains we made in the late '60s, in terms of working together, and in the early '70s talking together about co-operatives and other radical initiatives. We would probably eventually have built a place like this [hotel]. But we had declined so far from those initial hopes, because in the aftermath of the conflict and the polarisation which came in its wake it appeared that all was useless. I don't believe it all is useless. I think we can regain some of that lost ground.