

Republicanism in transition

(I) The need for a debate

compiled by

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Introduction

Among the main outcomes of what is referred to as the ‘Northern Ireland peace process’ were the IRA ceasefires of 1994 and 1997, the Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement of 1998, and the eventual setting up, in 2007, of new Assembly institutions at Stormont, in which Sinn Féin agreed to share power with the Democratic Unionist Party and other parties. To the general public these developments were greatly welcomed, not least because, with the ‘war’ being finally declared over, it was hoped that the new political dispensation would result in a ‘peace dividend’ which would see steady improvements in those working-class areas which had borne the brunt of the conflict.

However, in recent years discontent within sections of republicanism has been growing. Various groupings – Republican Sinn Féin, the Irish Republican Socialist Party, the Official Republican Movement, *éirígí*, the 32-County Sovereignty Movement, Republican Network for Unity, as well as groups of individuals who have as yet adopted no organisational name – have expressed disquiet about the policies and strategies adopted by Sinn Féin. Some of this disquiet has more to do with priorities – such as the need for a more robust defence of working-class interests – but to others it centres on fundamental disagreements as to the way present-day Irish Republicanism is evolving. And alongside these political groupings sit a handful of organisations which have decided to continue the ‘armed struggle’ – the Real IRA, the Continuity IRA, and Óglaigh na hÉireann – and whose activities have slowly escalated.

The media tends to label all republicans who disagree with the Sinn Féin analysis as ‘dissidents’, and focuses particularly on those groupings which it claims have links to the armed groups. But what do we really know about *any* of these groupings? What are their main differences with Sinn Féin and what are the alternative strategies which they are proposing?

In mid-2010 I was approached by a number of concerned community activists who felt that the current absence of debate within republicanism was only exacerbating an already worrying situation at a grassroots level. They felt that the process of engagement and dialogue which I had been promoting for many years could help facilitate such a debate. Now, my normal procedure is to bring together a small group of people (a ‘Think Tank’) to engage in open and honest discussion around an agreed theme, produce a pamphlet summarising that discussion, and then disseminate this pamphlet widely at a grassroots level – in order to bring the debate to a much wider audience. However, in this instance it was obvious that some members of the groupings listed above had little desire – certainly not at present – to engage directly with one another. Hence, after some discussion, it

was decided that this first pamphlet – in what is hoped will be an ongoing series – would focus on clarifying where different organisations stood on a number of important issues. With this objective in mind I would request an interview with a spokesperson for each organisation during which I would ask the following questions:

- (1) Where does your organisation believe Irish Republicanism is at present?
- (2) Does your organisation have a future perspective, or long-term strategy: i.e. how does it envisage events developing in five years, ten years?
- (3) Does your organisation have a socio-economic dimension to its analysis?
- (4) Where does your organisation stand in relation to ‘armed struggle’?
- (5) What is its perspective on the Protestant/Unionist community?
- (6) How does it see the attainment of a shared future (i.e. the Republican tradition of ‘uniting Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter’)?

All the organisations listed above were approached. Most of them readily agreed to an interview. However, although the Republican Network for Unity and the 32 County Sovereignty Movement did not respond to my repeated efforts to make contact (by the time this publication had to go to press), the process of engagement will still remain open to them. Just as it will remain open to Sinn Féin, who never responded to a series of hand-delivered letters (stretching over some six months) which endeavoured to enlist their participation (see Appendix).

This pamphlet will be distributed not only among the participating organisations, but within the wider community. The organisations will then be invited to send representatives to one of my normal ‘Think Tank’-type discussions, for a general debate on pertinent issues facing Irish Republicanism today, which will form the basis of a follow-up pamphlet.

With regard to this first pamphlet I think it is useful to clarify how the interviews were conducted. The organisations were represented in the interview by either one, two, or, in one instance, four individuals. This is indicated in each case. The interviews were allowed to develop spontaneously and my six questions were often answered without being formally asked. Hence, each response is of a free-flowing nature rather than contained within rigid ‘Q&A’ parameters.

Also, while each interviewee was technically speaking on behalf of his or her organisation, they often went from using ‘we’ to ‘I’. I have retained these variations, and would ask the reader to see the responses not as organisational positions set in stone but rather as honest conversations engaged in by leading members of those organisations.

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Irish Republican Socialist Party

The Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) claims the legacy of socialist revolutionary James Connolly, who founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896 and was executed for his part in the Easter Rising of 1916. The IRSP was founded in December 1974 by former members of the Official Republican Movement, independent socialists and trades unionists, and headed by Seamus Costello. A paramilitary wing, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), was secretly founded the same day. Seamus Costello was elected as the party's first chairperson and the army's first chief of staff. He had been expelled from the Official IRA following a court-martial. Along with other activists he was dissatisfied with the Official IRA's tactics and policies, especially on issues surrounding their 1972 ceasefire. In 1977 he was shot dead in his car. His supporters blamed the Official IRA for the murder. On 11 October 2009 the INLA ordered an end to the armed struggle.

(One representative was involved in the interview)

We feel that there has been a severe fracturing of Irish Republicanism. When the 'peace process' – or pacification process, as we would call it – began, it seemed that it was exclusive, not inclusive. Specifically, it was two main political groups who were doing most of the talking, supposedly on behalf of everybody else – which wasn't the case. But the 'peace process', leading into the 'political process', the joint referenda and the ceasefires, really was the death-knell for physical force republicanism. However, the problem was that two elements were deliberately linked – the Good Friday Agreement and peace. If you weren't fully behind what was in the Agreement, it was made to look as if you must be for a continuation of the war; indeed, there must be something wrong with you.

We had recognised that the armed struggle – or the war, whatever you want to call it – had burnt itself out. Even while it was ongoing there were sectarian aspects to it which we as a socialist party were totally opposed to, and we had made that very clear to the INLA on a number of occasions. In order for the IRSP to grow, in order for it to stand any chance of becoming a viable socialist alternative, the INLA would need to have a very close look at themselves and what they were about. They ultimately called their ceasefire, and in the ceasefire statement they were the only organisation who genuinely and openly apologised, admitting that they had been responsible for sectarian actions which were not befitting a national liberation army. So they apologised for the slaughter of Protestant workers and actions like that. That gave us a bit of breathing space to try and build relationships with the Protestant community, and that effort is ongoing.

But while we felt that the conditions for armed struggle no longer existed, on the other hand there were many aspects of the Good Friday Agreement which we were totally unhappy with. Our analysis of the Agreement pointed out that it was going to copper-fasten Partition – which it has done. It was going to institutionalise sectarianism – which it has done, because the members of the Stormont administration have to ‘designate’ themselves on a sectarian basis. There is nobody sitting in opposition up there: it simply reflects, and reinforces, the old ‘Orange and Green’ division. And we weren’t happy with that at all.

We believe that there needs to be a socialist programme for this island. That is our core belief. Now, that socialist programme will be inclusive of everybody, and would have an input from everybody. We realise there are a million or so Protestants/Unionists/Loyalists on this island, whose views and traditions and culture have to be taken into consideration. They aren’t going to get on the boats and go to Scotland. They were born here. Now, we may have fundamental differences in culture and political aspiration with working-class Protestants, but as we move into harsher times for ordinary people – and more and more is revealed daily about the greed and inefficiency of the capitalist system, and the way it just makes the rich richer and the poor poorer – we really believe that what we have in common will come increasingly to the fore.

The conditions no longer exist for armed struggle. We believe that republican socialist objectives should be, and can be, achieved politically, so no young lad needs to put himself in Maghaberry for twenty years, or end up on the street with six bullets in him. The armed struggle was tried and it failed. The IRSP is an all-Ireland party, and we can see that the problems faced by inner-city workers in Dublin or Cork, or in the rural areas, are akin to what is going on in Belfast, Derry, Armagh, wherever. This is a small island. It cannot sustain two education systems, two health systems; division is not economically viable.

We want to engage with the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community, and we are actively building and working on that. There has been some slight engagement already but we are seeking to develop more. There are progressive elements within that community who recognise the need for people to get together. I think David Ervine recognised that a long time ago, Billy Mitchell certainly did. If a Protestant says to us that they are British, that’s okay, we don’t have a problem with that. What matters is that working-class people on the Shankill are getting it as hard as working-class people on the Falls, so let’s work together. Tomorrow in Belfast trades unionists, Catholics, Protestants, atheists – whatever – will all be marching together against the cuts†. Because the ordinary people in both communities are going to suffer equally.

Many nationalists and republicans have said that the problem with loyalists

† The interviews took place around the time the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government was announcing substantial austerity cuts. Despite government assertions to the contrary, many economic analysts predicted that the working class, especially people on benefits, would be hardest hit.

is that they have a problem with their identity; indeed, some republicans cling to this notion that Ulster Protestants are really misguided Irishmen who one morning will wake up and realise their *true* identity. But that's nationalists and republicans making assumptions about the Protestant community. I don't believe we should do that. If I'm talking to a guy from the Shankill Road who tells me that he hangs a Union Jack outside his house every 12th July, that's okay with me. I will sit and debate with him about other issues. I certainly will not speak down on him and accuse him of being stupid, or say that one day the scales will fall from his eyes.

At the end of the day the IRSP is committed to a 32-county socialist worker's republic – that is our goal, we haven't diluted that for thirty-six years and are not going to now. We will say to the Protestant community, openly and honestly: that this is what we are about, this is what we want to achieve. We don't want to achieve it in isolation because we know we can't. We want to bring together as many of the working class as we can – Protestant and Catholic – into a broad front and say to them: here is a socialist programme that you can add to, take away from, have a debate about, have an input into – and then move forward.

We don't want to be politicians, we are radical community activists, we are not politicians. If we go into the city councils our representatives are going in on an expressed agenda, just like Sean Flynn did. They're going in with Costello's influence stamped on their brain and saying: we're representing the working-class people, the disenfranchised and the poor, and we're here to expose any double-dealings. We have a collective leadership which is elected every two years on the work it does. And at our Ard Fheis if you haven't done the work then you won't get elected or re-elected. At our Ard Comhairle, our National Executive meeting, any member of the IRSP can come along and say, 'Look lads, what are you doing here, I don't agree with this.' Every step this movement has taken has been with its membership dictating it. We are led from the bottom up. That is to stop the elitism, the self-seeker, to ensure that the movement is driven – as Costello always wanted – by the membership, not the leadership.

There are those republicans who would argue that we still need to fight for a United Ireland. Well, apart from the fact that the conditions no longer exist for armed struggle, we never in our lives fought for a United Ireland alone. If it isn't a workers' republic, based around a socialist programme, a United Ireland will just replace two exploiting jurisdictions by one. I would say to young lads: read Connolly, read Costello, read 'Ta' Power, and see what they had to say about the *type* of Ireland which is needed, and then go and make your decision as to what you want to fight for. Just don't make decisions like that simply on the back of hearing *Four Green Fields* being sung emotionally in your local pub, or some auld guy telling you: we gave it our best shot and failed, it's up to your generation now. Well, it failed in the fifties, it failed in the seventies, eighties and nineties and fought itself to a standstill. We have to try the political path.

Republican Sinn Féin

The decision to form Republican Sinn Féin (RSF) was taken in response to (Provisional) Sinn Féin's decision, at its 1986 Ard Fheis, to end its policy of abstentionism and to allow elected Sinn Féin TDs take their seats in Dáil Éireann. Those who went on to form RSF opposed this as to them it signalled a departure from the traditional republican analysis which viewed the parliament of the Republic of Ireland as an illegal assembly, set up by an act of the British parliament. They argued that republicans owed their allegiance to the All-Ireland Irish Republic, maintaining that this state existed de jure and that its authority rested with the IRA Army Council. RSF refused to recognise the validity of the Good Friday Agreement because the referendum on the agreement did not offer the people of Ireland the choice of living in a united Ireland. RSF opposes the Northern Ireland Assembly as it believes that this further entrenches the British presence in Ireland.

(One representative was involved in the interview)

Irish Republicanism is in a bad way at the moment. And it's all because of the sell-out of the Provisionals, the fact that they've become part and parcel of British administration here. Given all that our communities had gone through over the years, people were weary and wanted an end to it all – so most of them just went along with the flow. But now that people have had space to think about things, many republicans are gradually realising just what transpired. Despite the loss of life and the amount of people who went to prison there was nothing achieved. And when I talk about loss of life, I mean the loss of life right across the board, irrespective of whether it was a British soldier or an Irish person. Everybody paid a price. And we had all gone through that, including those families in England, for nothing. The British are still here, they are still occupying this country and have no intention of leaving. And it has left Irish Republicanism in turmoil. The sell-out of the Provisionals has fragmented the greatest movement this country ever created which had as its goal the creation of a United Ireland. They are now fully involved in administering British rule here. You can't solve the problem by becoming part of the problem. It has set the movement and the prospects for a United Ireland back many years.

The situation *is* retrievable, but it will take a long time. We are back to square one again. And that was something none of us ever wanted to see happen again here in Ireland. All that turmoil. We thought that at the end of the conflict at least there would be a British Declaration of Intent [to withdraw] that would stop it happening again – because there would be *no need* for it any more – but no, there was nothing on the table whatsoever regarding that. And, unfortunately, future generations are going to have to go through the whole thing all over again.

People in any country in the world experiencing a foreign occupation have the right to take up arms in a disciplined manner against the occupying forces. And until that occupying force leaves you will always have an armed resistance. It's regrettable but it's also inevitable. A journalist asked me about the shooting of the British soldiers at Massereene Barracks† and I replied that the British government was responsible. The journalist said: 'But they didn't fire the gun.' I replied that if British soldiers hadn't still been here there would have been no reason for those lads to take up guns against them.

I genuinely believe that the Protestant people are *our* people; they're Irish people. They have been misguided by the powers-that-be, especially at the very creation of this false statelet, who told them that it was 'a Protestant state for a Protestant people'. They are good people. And we need to work as one unit, irrespective of whatever religion we believe in, or whether we don't believe in any religion. We can live together, work together, even marry, and create a healthy and good future for this country and all its people. It's the only way forward.

I would like to reassure Protestants that their religion would not be discriminated against in a United Ireland. There should be a complete separation of church and state, every citizen should be treated equally. Likewise in terms of culture: nobody should be forced to learn the Irish language, or play Gaelic football... those things are solely for each individual to decide.

Our *Éire Nua* document gives a lot of power back to the people. It's based on giving power to each of the four provinces, and within the nine counties of Ulster the Protestant community would have a slight majority. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the launch of *Éire Nua*. The *Éire Nua* proposals have been put before the representatives of Unionism/Loyalism most notably at the Feakle talks in 1974, although the 26-County Special Branch disrupted those talks. During the talks Loyalist/Unionist leaders admitted that whilst their preference was for an independent Six-County†† state they viewed the *Éire Nua* programme as providing a realistic basis for a settlement. The Sean MacBride/Desmond Boal talks in 1977 were sabotaged when a Minister of the 26-County administration, the late Conor Cruise O'Brien, revealed on RTÉ that the talks were taking place. This breached a condition of the loyalist side that the talks were not to be publicised. The intervention of the 26-County state in both cases stifled realistic prospects of reaching a real accommodation between all sections of the Irish people.

Speaking in University College Cork in January 2008 the then President of

† On 7 March 2009 the Real IRA shot dead two soldiers and injured two civilians at Massereene Army Barracks in Antrim town. Two days later a Catholic policeman was shot dead by the Continuity IRA in Craigavon.

†† Most Irish nationalists refer to Northern Ireland as the 'Six Counties', in that it comprises six of the nine counties of the historical province of Ulster – the other three being in the Republic of Ireland. Ironically, the nine-county configuration which many assume to be 'ancient Ulster' – the six counties within Northern Ireland plus counties Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan in the Republic – is of English design, for right up until the end of the 16th century Ulster was held to include the territory now in County Louth but not Cavan. It was Queen Elizabeth I's administrators who decided to add Louth to the province of Leinster and attach Cavan to Ulster.

Republican Sinn Féin and current Patron Ruairí Ó Brádaigh said: “We do not want to back the Unionists on to a cliff-edge politically where they will oppose us all the more. Neither do we seek to have them as a permanent and disgruntled political minority in one corner of Ireland. Besides, the proposals outlined would be more in keeping with the ideas of Wolfe Tone and Thomas Davis.”

During the 1970s soundings were taken with every shade of unionism to obtain their reaction to the question: what would they do if the British did disengage from Ireland? The response in all cases was similar. First choice was an independent Six Counties. We did not think that would be viable. In that case all said they would opt for our ‘four provinces’ idea as the “most generous on offer”. As recently as last September, a delegation from the Ulster-Scots Society at a seminar in Donegal town reacted in the same manner: ‘provincial government’ was what interested them. Apart from providing a solution to the Ulster situation, the *Éire Nua* proposals would bring power nearer to the people and help to correct east-west economic imbalance nationally. Republicans submit that such structures will be necessary to ensure justice for all, including the 18% of the national population who have supported the unionist position.

In the 1970s *Éire Nua* was examined by a number of political scientists who were unanimous in their verdict that it contained all the necessary democratic checks and balances required to address the concerns and protect the rights of all sections of the population.

In order to implement these proposals Republican Sinn Féin calls for the establishment of a Constituent Assembly elected by the adult suffrage of the whole people of Ireland. Instead of two different sets of questions being posed in the two parts of Ireland to determine a way forward for the entire country, the Irish people, acting as a unit, must be free to exercise their national right to self-determination.

Nobody wants to go back to war. In all honesty, who wants war? Common sense would tell you that, for there is always a heavy price to pay. And if we could settle this peacefully it would be far better. However, I believe that for any armed struggle to end there would have to be a Declaration of Intent. That Declaration could state a time-frame of ten, even twenty years, but the British must commit themselves to leave after that. Time to leave the Irish people, especially within the occupied Six Counties, space to come to terms with each other, to work with each other, and determine how we build a new future together, harnessing *all* our resources and energies.

Now, although I have no say or control over the armed struggle – I simply represent Republican Sinn Féin – I believe that a Declaration of Intent from the British government would bring an end to that struggle; that’s all that would be needed. We all want a peaceful Ireland, but peaceful for the rest of its days, not just in the short term. And the only way a permanent peace can come about is if Protestants and Catholics – and everyone else – can come together, without external interference, and build a new Ireland.

Official Republican Movement

At the beginning of the Troubles the leadership of the IRA had embraced non-violent civil agitation and sought to promote working-class unity between Protestants and Catholics. However, in December 1969, some members, determined to wage 'armed struggle' against British rule in Northern Ireland, split away to form the Provisional IRA, with the parent body becoming known as the Official IRA. The Officials called a ceasefire in 1972. In 1974 a split within the Official IRA led to the formation of the IRSP. In 1982 Official Sinn Féin became The Workers Party, but this also experienced a split. In the late 1990s, some Northern-based former Official IRA members launched a "re-founded" Official Republican Movement (ORM), intended to pursue the socialist republican politics which had been espoused in the 1970s. In February 2010 the ORM announced that all its weapons had been decommissioned.

(Two representatives were involved in the interview)

Historically Irish Republicans have regarded themselves as the inheritors of not only the holy grail of Irish politics, but of the concept of Irishness itself. All sections and factions claim true lineage from the United Irishmen, without encouraging study of what Tone and others stood for, besides ridding Ireland of English rule. Believing that that lineage somehow absolved them from internal and external political debate, a certain arrogance developed and they believed they were entitled to the automatic support of the nationalist population. Failure in past campaigns was blamed on the people not dutifully supporting the armed struggle. Even when republicans adopted socialism, they tended to remain insular and avoid internal debate. But that has to change, although a debate on the future of republicanism, even if necessary and timely, will be no easy task. We as a group would actively support actions to instigate such an analysis.

Irish republicanism is currently in a state of flux. Throughout its history republicanism always had a section of the Irish population who supported it, and understood why people struggled for it. The level of support would have fluctuated at different times, and I believe that today it would be low – because people throughout Ireland are no longer sure what it stands for. To us, Irish republicanism is a concept quite different to Irish nationalism, but I suspect that the majority of people in Ireland today believe them to be one and the same. They regard us all as United Irishmen, some with more of a sense of urgency than others. The majority probably believe that an extension of the southern state would be acceptable to us all. There is no doubt the over the past century republicanism and nationalism have become intertwined. Part of any debate should include the question: can they be separated again? And do enough people care one way or the other?

We contend that republicanism is not the same as nationalism. Nationalism tends to veer towards the right wing of politics, as can be seen from the nature of nationalist movements and political parties throughout Europe and beyond. Republicanism with its progressive and radical historical credentials has to declare itself in opposition to right-wing ideologies that promote policies which protect the wealthy and privileged and which sustain and camouflage economic and social inequalities at the expense of working-class people and communities.

Modern Irish republicanism must place itself within and on the side of these people and communities, and the only honest place to do that is on the left of the political spectrum. Not a 'purest and disconnected left' of groups, organisations and parties that spend the majority of their time convincing themselves that they have all the answers and all other organisations are wrong, but a left political analysis and democratic programme of social and economic change that offers a shared way forward for the majority of people to a just and fairer society that values all its citizens with tolerance and equality. Realistically, in the present circumstances that means a political debate about how the profits of the capitalist system can be distributed more evenly. That is far more preferable to the present tribal system. There can be no quantum leap from the present system to socialism.

We eventually came to the conclusion that our own left-wing politics are perceived by most people to be too far removed from the realities of everyday life to have any real meaning for them. Most ordinary working-class people have no concern or interest in fractious and sterile debates about who are the 'real' socialists. It is incumbent upon all who would describe themselves as 'left/progressive' to have the maturity and courage to begin a process whereby we can re-connect again with the majority of ordinary working people. For that reason a stepping stone must be laid to reconnect people with radical politics.

We believe, especially here in the north, that there has to be a new political alignment. First of all the border question has to be got out of the way – and it *is* out of the way. The main parties to the Good Friday Agreement tend not to admit that they have agreed this. The DUP won't admit that the Union is safe for now, the Shinnars can't admit that they have agreed that the Protestant people can be unionist until they decide to vote otherwise. Why? Because both parties are afraid that voters might not feel the same need to vote for *them*.

There has to be a coming together of progressive forces. Social democracy, as the prevailing democratic form, must be engaged and there needs to be a new alliance of radical and democratic forces of a cross-community nature. One of our primary tasks is to break down the long-established sectarian voting patterns. And how can we begin this huge undertaking? We believe there could be some sort of alliance – given form through the creation of a Social Forum – where people from different backgrounds and organisations would come together to express shared concerns – about the health service, jobs, education, housing, all the issues that effect our quality of life. Then collectively, through debate and discussion, they could draw up for instance a ten-point platform of common objectives.

The Forum would then publicise this platform, and ask all political parties and groupings where they stood in relation to the ten points. The Forum would then urge the electorate to consider voting for parties or individuals willing to support elements of the platform. Not necessarily as a first or even second preference, but perhaps as a third preference. So, even if the majority were still voting for their respective tribal parties, by casting their second or third vote according to their *socio-economic interests*, this would begin to break down ancient taboos.

It was the case in the past that republicans quoted the Second Dáil as historical justification for ‘armed struggle’, but the 1918 vote is now superseded by the vote in 1998 – with the two referenda North and South – and that is the new reality. The people of Ireland said clearly that they want violence to end. And those who want to continue it are either in denial of that reality or flying in the face of the expressed will of the Irish people.

Economic and cultural oppression is no longer felt by the majority of nationalists; there is a confidence among them that anything can be achieved without the use of violence. In 1969 they *were* an oppressed community, both economically and culturally, but those days have gone. There is no real basis for anyone to go back to war in support of an ‘oppressed nationalist people’, for there is no such thing today. Certainly, this society has many marginalised and disadvantaged communities, but they are marginalised not because they are nationalist, but because they are working class – and that includes the Protestant community as much as the Catholic community. Any return to ‘armed struggle’ and its divisiveness is the last thing the working class needs.

The Protestant working class, from an outsider’s point of view, were manipulated. The Unionist establishment sought to control them through fear of nationalism and Rome Rule, and the pick of industrial jobs as a gift for unquestioning loyalty. But successive Free State governments didn’t do anything to allay those fears. If a country accords a special place to the Catholic religion why would Protestants want to be part of it? In fact, how can we expect the Protestant community to join a republic if we cannot tell them what kind of a republic it is going to be? That’s the first thing we have to do: explain to everyone, including ourselves, what this republic might look like. What kind of economic structure would it have? What rights will be accorded to all its citizens? How will religious tolerance be safeguarded? How will different cultures be encouraged to find genuine expression? Nobody, certainly not Sinn Féin, has even begun to do that.

Sectarianism continues to be the major problem. It is now institutionalised and legalised in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. The way the Agreement was originally presented was probably right at the time – as a bedding-in process where our elected representatives could learn the art of political dialogue. Twelve years on it should have progressed a lot further. But it seems there are too many people afraid of losing the power that the ‘tribal vote’ has given them. The peace walls will not be coming down in the near future, it will take a lot of time and effort. That does not mean time can be wasted – Labour can wait no longer.

éirígí

éirígí was formed by a small group of activists in Dublin in April 2006 as a political campaigns group. It sees campaigns as part of a progressive social movement that incorporates local communities, organised labour, cultural organisations, campaign groups and political parties. On 12 May 2007, at the party's first Ard Fheis, its members voted to become a fully-fledged political party, and at its 2009 Ard Fheis passed a motion to register as a political party in the Republic of Ireland. It believes in an all-Ireland Democratic Socialist Republic.

(One representative was involved in the interview)

From éirígí's perspective, Irish Republicanism is emerging from an historic, strategic defeat. What has passed for the 'peace process' over the past fifteen years has been, in effect, the latest stage in the British government's normalisation, Ulsterisation, criminalisation process; it has been the most successful attempt at that strategy since it was devised in the 1970s, and it dealt a severe blow to the organisational strength, to the strategic objectives, and to the state of republicanism in general in Ireland. So, whenever éirígí was established it was established on the basis that we needed to be honest about where Irish Republicanism was at, and not to kid ourselves that it was at some place we would like to be in, but in reality wasn't. We are now emerging from that period of defeat and effectively trying to reorganise the republican movement and the republican struggle, to once again make it relevant, make its demands relevant, to make its organisational structures relevant to working-class communities in Belfast, across the Six Counties and across Ireland. And there is no more important time to be doing that than in the period of economic chaos we're now facing.

Effectively the politics of éirígí is the politics of James Connolly. The social and national aspects of the struggle in Ireland cannot be separated; our strategy is based on the socio-economic conditions which prevail and how they affect people on the ground in real terms in Ireland. So éirígí's activity and its theory is about having the social and economic struggle go in tandem with the national struggle. Now, many things over the course of the last hundred years of republican struggle have retarded the development of that struggle in reaching success: militarism, electoralism, and the 'labour must wait' strategy. That has retarded the popularisation of the republican message and the republican struggle, and for it to be successful it must appeal to people where they're at in working-class areas, appeal to their everyday lives and the hardships they are facing. And if it doesn't offer a solution to those social and economic problems then the national component can never be achieved successfully. And because the British government, Unionism, those in power, will always be able to put reformist packages on the agenda which will syphon off the less radical aspect of republicanism, the whole

thrust and leadership of republicanism must therefore be working class, must be irreconcilably socialist as well as republican.

The Six Counties is, was set up as, and remains, a sectarian state. In the words of Craigavon, it was ‘A Protestant parliament for a Protestant people’. But in the same way that Catholic working-class people have been failed by this state, Protestant working-class people have also been failed by this state. They have been used and abused by the Unionist political class, by the British government, not only throughout the history of the northern state but for the last two hundred years – since the inception of the United Irishmen effectively. You only have to look at the fact that both unionist parties fought a rearguard in defence of the 11-plus,[†] yet one of the areas they are meant to represent, the Shankill, had a 1% pass rate of its children for the 11-plus. It was an act of complete and utter treachery to be supporting the very thing that disserves your children so much. But people need to look at the reasons behind that. The two Unionist parties are, in socio-economic terms – and, indeed, in every term – effectively right-wing entities. The Ulster Unionist Party is effectively the Six-County wing of the British Conservative Party, and the Democratic Unionist Party is, if anything, even further to the right of that. So there has never been a political manifestation that has served the Protestant working class. That is not to patronise anybody; the fact is that nobody can liberate anybody else from what is oppressing them, people have to do it themselves. And for the Protestant working class to buy into socialism it must begin to recognise that the ideology of unionism or loyalism or Orangeism is inherently reactionary. And any connection with the British state, or any continued manifestation of the Six County state, is not going to serve anybody in that state, bar those who have their hands on the levers of power.

If Protestants feel themselves to have a British identity, well then... an identity is an identity, you can't take somebody's identity away from them. Now, Republicans could talk about it in terms of false consciousness, but really it is something which needs to be worked out by Protestants themselves, and themselves alone. But éirígí is determined to extend the hand of friendship and comradeship to working-class people in unionist areas across the Six Counties. Religion has historically been used, and is still being used, to divide people from the real issues that are in front of them. The vast majority of our members are involved in trades unions, working every day of the week with people from Protestant working-class areas on issues of shared concern. The majority of our members have been involved in many community issues and campaigns. Issues like the lack of provision of social housing. I myself have worked with Protestants from the ‘Village’ area on social housing campaigns. We were also involved in one in West Belfast, and it wouldn't have been sensible for us to be running two parallel campaigns and not sharing experiences and not effectively supporting each other.

[†] The 11-plus – or Eleven plus – is a UK examination administered to some children in their last year of primary education, which effectively dictates admission to different types of secondary school.

éirígí is not aligned to, nor supportive of, any armed groups, and it follows from this that we don't support the actions of any armed groups. The conditions for armed struggle don't exist in Ireland today, certainly not for a successful one. That is our position. Was armed struggle ever justified? Yes, of course it was. The nationalist community was involved in, effectively, an insurgency against the British state over the last thirty years, and it has to be remembered that the cause of that insurgency, and the cause of the conflict, was the attempt to batter a peaceful Civil Rights movement off the streets. And then bring in thousands of British troops to shore up this state at the point when it was teetering on the point of collapse. So people had no choice but to engage in armed struggle. But, that said, it doesn't excuse militarism. There is always more than one means of struggle, and just like you shouldn't deify electoralism, you shouldn't deify militarism. You should always base your struggle on a realistic analysis of where society is at. What armed groups are engaged in now is militarism.

One very important point that needs to be made, because it's largely lost in the media coverage, is that the vast majority of republicans – *non*-Sinn Féin republicans, that is – whilst they're opposed to the status quo and the set-up at Stormont, *aren't* proposing that we should be engaging in an armed struggle at this time. The majority are opposed to armed actions. But the media don't want to point that out. At the core of éirígí's strategy we need to build a social movement that encompasses every sort of grievance in Ireland, whether it is around the economy, trades unions, residents' associations, community groups, those involved in cultural activities, sporting organisations.... And especially at a time like this when the 'cuts' are going to decimate working-class areas. There's never been more of a need for it than now. Effectively it is the only thing which hasn't been tried to end British occupation. We've tried electoralism, we've tried armed struggle, everything bar mobilising tens of thousands of people.

éirígí believes that the central factor of life in Ireland, as anywhere, is based on the notion of class. Class will determine how you live your life, how your community lives its life – basically every fundamental relationship people have with the state or with work will be determined by it. So it is a class-based ideology we adhere to, the politics of James Connolly and other socialists and republicans throughout history.

What éirígí is offering to working-class people from the Shankill, or Sandy Row or anywhere else, is exactly the same programme it is offering to people in West Belfast or Derry or any working-class nationalist area. There has been a lot of talk in recent years about what has been called 'unionist engagement', and we do believe in engagement with the unionist community, but certainly not with the unionist business class, or the DUP, or the Orange Order, or the Unionist Party. It is with the people in Sandy Row or Tiger's Bay, who are facing exactly the same problems that we are in our areas: deprivation, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, homelessness, and long waiting lists for social housing – all these issues are of common concern, and we should deal with them on a common basis.

A group of independent Republicans

Some non-Sinn Féin republicans who have not joined any of the organisations listed in this document, nevertheless meet regularly – as individuals – to discuss and share current concerns. One such group, located in West Belfast, was keen to have some of those concerns recorded in this pamphlet.

(Four representatives were involved in the interview)

I think Irish Republicanism is at its lowest ebb. I believe the period we are in today is a period of constitutional nationalism at best. I think we're into a process of reform, and that reform doesn't even carry with it a brand of politics. I think the machinations of the DUP and Sinn Féin in the Assembly is evidence of that. There is no ideological line coming out from either of them; it's just about party power. But, most importantly, the contradictions which gave birth to the republican ideology have not been addressed. And in an Irish context, this means that you are consigning a future generation to yet more conflict and violence. I believe that those who believe in the establishment of a Republic will always feel an obligation to complete that process. Now, I don't think that means it necessarily has to be an armed or a violent process, but it has to have a United Ireland as its goal. To try and dress things up in terms of the Good Friday Agreement, the St. Andrews accord, or the Hillsborough agreement, is just so much smoke and mirrors. It might get you through in the short term, but it won't give you the basis on which to build a new society.

Some people call what has transpired as a 'betrayal', but I have never felt betrayed by republicanism. I believe that what's happening at the moment is just the latest phase of England's campaign in Ireland. It has been designed in Whitehall and is being implemented here. I don't think the broad membership of Sinn Féin set out to betray anybody, and I don't think they feel they have betrayed anybody; they have just been sucked into the latest British strategy.

The majority of Irish people tend to go along with reformist politics. In Home Rule days most people went along with John Redmond. And the majority went for Partition. It's the same now. A majority of people have gone along with Sinn Féin's reformism and only a small minority want to continue on with republicanism. But I am hoping that around the 100th anniversary commemorations of the 1916 Rising republicanism will be revamped nationally. Because the ideals of 1916 will be brought back into the frame and people are going to ask: well, what's Ireland like now? Is the Ireland of today the Ireland these people died for?

I think over the years people in republican and nationalist areas were very politicised but that is now largely gone. I think that if people could be mobilised again, especially around the 'cuts', I think that gives republicans a massive opportunity. And I think mass mobilisation is maybe a better way – getting

people out onto the streets. And people *will* mobilise if they are mobilised on the right basis. As they did in '69, or when the women mobilised to break the Falls Curfew. That was political agitation at its best.

The national question will have to be dealt with. And I mean dealt with, not just reformed. Yet we have the ironic situation where the people who shouted that fact loudest in the late '60s and early '70s are now the people who are actually administering the state infrastructure that will stop even any reform taking place. So, if anything, I feel we are going backwards now.

With regard to the Protestant community and their 'Britishness', to me the crux of the issue is the difference between someone's identity and someone's politics. I don't care if people identify with a 'British way of life', or British culture, or even the Royal Family, that's their business. But their *politics* have to reflect what actually takes us as a society forward, as opposed to one which just leaves us in limbo. Now, whether the powers-that-be like to admit it or not, we have a tiered system here, based on class, and if you want proof of that just walk around the corner and then get into a car and drive over to the Malone Road – and tell me that you can't see a difference. Take that recent survey which found that people in working-class areas felt more socially secure *pre*-1994 than *post*-1994. And the only way to confront social inequalities is to have *real* politics emerge here. But the development of real politics has always been prevented by the British presence, so to me the only way to move forward is to remove that presence so that we can work with one another as equals. It makes sense that the people who live in what is really a very small piece of land actually cooperate with one another. Surely it makes sense to sit down and talk with one another.

I don't see the Protestant community as being the 'British problem'. I see them as Irish people. I don't even go along with that old republican notion that they're 'misguided' Irishmen and Irishwomen: they are just Irish people who have a different view. Just as the people who live in 'Dublin 1' have a different view: the 'Pale' is alive and kicking. There are a whole host of different views across this island. The people in Limerick who are trying to deal with 'stab city', the people who are trying to deal with the cuts in rural Ireland, and the people in the Six Counties who are dealing with the fact that they cannot elect a government which is going to look after *their own* affairs. We can't do that. The people who make the decisions about our affairs sit over in Westminster and we're controlled by them. Someone should explain to me why I should endure that, and have a lesser quality of life, just because somewhere in our chequered past someone decided 'I want that piece of land'.

The Brits still control the main things here. Financially they control this country. Stormont has to stick its hand out and they decide how much to give us, so financially they are in full control here. Politically they are in full control here. The Secretary of State can close Stormont down tomorrow. He has the power to call inquiries, intervene in inquiries, and do all that type of thing. Militarily the Brits still have full control because they control policing through MI5. They can

bring the British Army in tomorrow morning, Stormont has no say in it. Stormont hasn't really got any more power than an administrative council anywhere in England. And while Britain remains in Ireland you are going to get people who will want to use physical force to try and force them out. And when I say 'them' I don't mean the Protestants, for I see them as Irish people. But until you remove the British presence – remove once and for all the political, financial and other means by which we are controlled from Westminster – it will be difficult to get down to working things out with the Protestants.

How do we move towards a shared future? Well, through honesty first of all. I think that's what has always been missing from politics in this country. People don't believe politicians – at all! What they do is they vote for those ones they disbelieve less. *All* our politicians, Sinn Féin included, will tell whatever lies they feel they have to. So, for me, an open and honest debate is where it needs to begin. The difficulty is that you have to try and get through all that structure that has been built up to stop it happening. You can't even begin to have that debate and dialogue, and it is one of the reasons why I think this exercise [the pamphlets] is so worthwhile.

The fact that Protestant and Catholic can stand together at Stormont – in the form of Sinn Féin and the DUP – is *not* the old ideal of Protestants and Catholics standing together in freedom and equality; it's simply Protestants and Catholics standing together under British rule. Northern Ireland was built on institutionalised sectarianism, and the present set-up at Stormont is just a continuation of that, despite all the talk about a shared future and equality. Sinn Féin and the DUP both rely on a sectarian headcount to survive. But I think the façade which has been built around the whole set-up at Stormont will gradually fall apart.

Since the reformation of Stormont, with Sinn Féin entering into the administration, peace walls have increased, they are often bigger, and are in more diverse places. Sectarianism still very much exists. And it's partly because each of those political parties will exploit the situation; they *want* people to feel fear, to be cocooned in their own communities, because that guarantees them their votes.

You'll get more honesty from local people sitting down with people from the other side of the community, and you'll get more out of it. That's where we need to start. Also, I personally am very keen for us as a group, and republicans in general, to develop the idea of oppositional and agitational politics, as an alternative to the use of physical force, and that's what I would like to see incorporated in any debate about a future vision.

If our goal is the achievement of a Republic the size of the task in front of us is immense. Now, given that 2016 should see the rekindling of the ideals of Republicanism, what is it that republicans should be involved in over the next five years to bring those ideals closer to realisation? We need to do more than just pay lip service to the old clichés of 'organise, agitate and educate...' Some of us have talked about the idea of establishing cultural societies within local areas, which could help to keep the flame of Republicanism from being extinguished.

Further comments

During the course of the interviews – from which the ‘position paper’ material was compiled – other comments were made which provide a deeper insight into the thinking of the interviewees. A number of these comments are collated here, grouped around different themes. It should be noted that while some of the quotes indicate that two or more people were engaged in a dialogue, most were recorded at different times and on separate occasions.

Grassroots disenchantment

In ‘bread and butter’ terms, there was a widespread perception that no real socio-economic ‘peace dividend’ had materialised.

- Twelve years after the Good Friday Agreement was signed there has been no substantial social or economic improvement in our areas. There has been no change since the last time (1998) the multi-deprivation indexes were published for the Six Counties: the top five areas are *still* in West Belfast, the top three *still* include the Whiterock and Ballymurphy area. The fact is that this state is irreformable, and just as you can’t reform it on a political level, you can’t reform it on a socio-economic level either – it is fundamentally rotten at the core.
- I think Sinn Féin is facing a real dilemma now. They had talked up all these great changes that would happen, but really everything so far has proven to have been retrograde.
- There’s a massive disconnect in many areas between people at the grassroots and those up at Stormont. And you’re going to see an increase in this disconnect whenever Sinn Féin bite the bullet and implement these ‘cuts’. There’s no other way round it. Their only other option is to say: do your own dirty work. But they will not do that; they have invested their whole political careers in this new Assembly arrangement, so they have to implement them. And that will seriously increase the amount of trauma there’s going to be in these areas – and Sinn Féin will be partly responsible for it.
- I had a man come in to our office the other day. People in his area had started up a community watch because of the thugs who are running wild around the area, tormenting and torturing the elderly and everyone else. And the Proxies have lost the support of a lot of people because they refuse to do anything about it. Now, all they would need to do is to say to these young thugs: ‘Right, enough is enough, clear off!’ But they won’t even do that, they just ignore it – or else tell

people to go to the peelers! – and the destruction within our communities just continues. Old Republicans are starting to walk away from them because of it.

There was also a growing political disillusionment.

- In terms of West Belfast, if you consider the amount of people who went through prison, or were actively engaged – and you're talking about thousands of people – there's bound to be a sense of disenchantment among those people: did they make that sacrifice simply for a new Northern Ireland, for a reformed statelet?
- My view of it is that when Sinn Féin were in these negotiations a lot of grassroots people didn't really know what was going on behind the scenes, and were only being told what the Sinn Féin line was. And I believe now that we were told a lot of lies. However, I think that a lot of people are starting to see that they were duped, and are starting to ask a lot of questions.
- During the long period of political talks, a sort of normalisation kicked in, and I think that did grave damage to Republicanism. A 'normal' society, under British rule, could only be damaging to our cause. The Brits were able to get Sinn Féin into Stormont *without* Republicanism. I suppose we should have voiced our opinions more strongly rather than leave everything to the leadership. And now people feel we have to start everything again from scratch.
- A lot of that was to do with trust. People just blindly followed where they were told they were being taken, and I think that's one of the reasons republicans are now so fragmented. There is so much mistrust.
- I think the fragmentation was a classical example of social engineering. It happened in stages, it wasn't done suddenly. Rather than experience a massive split in the ranks, I think the Sinn Féin leadership made a conscious decision to whittle dissenting voices off bit by bit. Looking back, you can see the different times when people felt they had to walk away from the movement. A few on one occasion, another few on the next. It was a gradual process. I think that Sinn Féin's biggest concern now is that that trend seems to be reversing and that people who at one time seemed quite disparate and isolated now seem to be coming together more and more.
- I think the process goes back to before 1986. During the period of the 'peace process' especially they were trying to normalise everything to let it stretch out, to where everyone was comfortable that there were no shootings, no bombings. And eventually it came to the stage where people were saying – and still say it – that we don't want to go back to that. I think there was a strategy of bringing people along with the party line. But they should have done so openly, not in the way they did. At one stage when I went to walk away I was told to hold on, that decommissioning was never going to happen. But I was just basically being lied to. But by stretching it out long enough whenever you again went to walk away, this time they could say, 'Well, go ahead then.'

- I was looking at some of the statements made over the years by different British Secretaries of State, especially when they came out to condemn the actions of republicans – and the statements of today’s Sinn Féin leadership read almost identical!
- I think the Shinners are going to face a real dilemma when the 100th anniversary [of the Easter Rising] comes along. Because there will be a whole new focus nationally about what the ideals were of the men of 1916.
- When things kicked off in ’69/70, communities were plunged into total warfare. I think a lot of people got caught up in what was happening around them, joined the IRA and ended up in jail. And I think it was only when they were in jail that they started to think: what happened there? what was I involved in there? I think a lot of people got involved in the IRA who weren’t really republican. They were just caught up in a conflict which developed its own momentum. I think people who were genuinely republican-minded, and were thinking about the actual ideology of Republicanism, were few and far between. I think that’s one of the reasons you never really had a debate.

The lack of an internal debate

While most of the interviewees bemoaned the lack of any real internal republican debate, they acknowledged that there could be no debate without engagement, and that had always proved illusive for different reasons.

- Any debate or engagement within Republicanism would be very tough. Deep-seated memories of the different feuds are still very painful. It’s actually easier engaging with loyalists. And anyway, what tends to happen when different republican groups meet is that the discussion gets dragged back to basics. Somebody from one of the organisations will invariably say, ‘There’s men in prison now – we should be concentrating on getting them out.’ And as a result any deeper debate goes by the board, and it always comes down to the lowest common denominator: the white-line picket. Now, that’s all well and good, but it’s not what republican engagement is about.
- What happens with left-wing and republican groups throughout history is that each of them always believes they possess the ‘one true gospel’, and a party member’s job is to go out and convert people to this one true gospel. And when you went along to any meetings about republican unity or socialist unity, it was always a case of each faction trying to convert all the others. We were no different. When we had the Workers’ Party we lived in ivory towers, and thought we had all the answers to the ills of the world. And parties become manipulative and conspiratorial: if we could only get control of such and such an organisation, or if we could get them to vote a certain way.... In the end you’re having as little

regard for the ordinary people as right-wingers and conservatives do because you're treating them as people to manipulate.

- Can republicans work together? Look, we already work together on different things; we are not enemies, we speak to one another. The only people we don't talk to are Provisional Sinn Féin, for they are dictators, and nobody is allowed to say or do anything within our communities except them. If you set something up within communities and they can't control it, then they will destroy it. There is no democracy with the Provos. But then they are a part of the British establishment now. Within the nationalist community – and I know this for a fact – the only people who are allowed to do anything are the Provies.
- One of the reasons Sinn Féin have a problem is that they don't just want to take leadership of something, they want to take *ownership*. They also want to totally dominate the whole history of Republicanism, claiming that they are the *true* republicans, the true inheritors of Tone... Connolly, and Davitt, right down the line... 'We're the people who actually have the right to ownership of the words "Irish Republican" '. The rest of us don't exist; we would be airbrushed out of Irish history if they had their way.
- I think there *is* an issue with control there, nobody could deny that, but I would be loathe to overestimate Sinn Féin's potency. There's a load of community initiatives out there which are genuinely independent initiatives, and aren't controlled by Sinn Féin.
- Internal republican debates have been going on for a long time. We were involved from the outset: it was a coming together of independent republicans, the 32-County Sovereignty Movement, the Republican Network for Unity – and the IRSP chaired a lot of those meetings, and played a full role in them. But what they started developing into was not a talking shop per se but slandering and personal attacks on Sinn Féin. We were looking to get a political debate going, and create a broad front of opposition to what was going on, and to put across our analysis... and it didn't happen.
- Who are the 'true' republicans today? There have been so many splits. Everyone can claim to be the true inheritors. We don't have all the answers, but we would be more than willing to engage and debate with any group, and if the concept of republican unity was possible we would try and facilitate it. But do I personally think it is possible? No. Too much has happened. There are too many people with entrenched views and the legacy of the feuds has created mindsets that are not going to change.

Scepticism was voiced regarding Sinn Féin's offer to talk to other groups.

- Gerry Adams made the comment, initially on Radio Ulster, that he had approached all organisations which supported armed groups, but then consciously named éirígí within that. He has done that a couple of times. So, in response, we put out

a statement saying that éirígí had no problem with engagement, but we had no interest in having behind-closed-doors discussions. If Sinn Féin want to have a debate let's do it publicly, and encourage public participation in it. But there was no response to that. I don't think it was a genuine attempt at engagement.

- Gerry Kelly and Adams keep saying that they will speak to anyone. But it is fairly clearly that they will do so only on their terms, which is not really genuine dialogue.
- Some of their people on the ground are good, solid community workers. Yet I know a couple of them who have been put under real pressure to toe the party line, especially when the party tries to oust other good community workers from the committees of community organisations, just because they in turn won't toe a Sinn Féin line.
- I think that for the likes of the Sinn Féin leadership, a debate wouldn't have suited them, especially from about the '80s onwards. They wanted to control things. See from the 'peace process' really started to kick in, every time we were pulled into a room someone came in, gave the Army line, or the party line, or whatever, and another person wrote questions down. But they never brought us back answers, they just wanted to know what we were thinking. And through time I think they were planning: we can move this forward stage by stage, and can afford to lose a few people here, a few there. I think that if they had tried to go down this road thirteen years ago all of a sudden you'd have got a massive walkout of people.
- Debate has been stifled over the years. There was no debate among the volunteers. I recall, when I was inside, we were invited to submit questions, via 'comms'[†]. So we put in two. One suggesting that our negotiators be changed as the Brits seemed to have their measure, and two, opposing the Good Friday Agreement. When we heard nothing back I asked a senior member why not. And he just laughed: 'Were you expecting a debate or something! Catch yerself on, this is the IRA!'
- People on the ground never had a say. It was a leadership-led group the whole way.
- Let's be clear about it: any resurgence of Republicanism does *not* have to be of a violent nature. If genuine republicans are permitted to play a full political role – with the right to protest and agitate for their case – then they can become, if you like, an active and radical opposition. But if their voice is denied, by the state trying to demonise them or bring in draconian measures – ostensibly to target those engaged in armed struggle, but in effect used against all opposition – then I can see violence escalating. And that would not be what we want. There

[†] Notes, usually written on the back of cigarette papers, and used by prisoners as a means of communication with those on the outside.

must be a debate allowed. And that is why I believe that what we're engaged in now – starting with these pamphlets – is so useful. We have few other avenues open to us. Adams comes onto the media saying he wants to meet with loyalists and unionist businessmen – and he actually follows up on that – yet he has this big problem which prevents him sitting down with other republicans.

The question of 'armed struggle'

The majority of the interviewees were against any return to 'armed struggle'.

- I wouldn't be so flippant to say that it [armed struggle] will burn itself out. I mean, Irish history will tell you that there will always be some pockets of resistance against British occupation here. It has certainly stepped up a gear recently. Now, there is a two-pronged problem here. As these 'cuts' really bite in, increasing poverty will turn many young people to crime, while others will be attracted into some of the groups who aren't on ceasefire, either out of boredom or a republican sense of loyalty. But certainly, it can provide a sort of outlet for those who feel alienated, there's no doubt about that. I would say to these young men and women: is that really the best way to serve your class? We are saying: try the political road. Another thirty-five years of killing and blowing people up is not the way. It has failed. In the seventies and eighties there were different conditions and many people would have said there was no other way. Although, having said that, some of the founders of the IRSP were saying as far back as 1976 and '77 that yes, there is another way: let's try and unite the working class. They were saying that back then, but they were a small minority. Because when people were being shot dead, or houses burned out, people didn't want to listen to that type of analysis.

- Now, we're not speaking as pacifists; we've all been there and done the thing ourselves. But to think that some people want to start the Troubles up again! But they couldn't do it anyway; there's no way that the Catholic community are going to involve themselves in a new uprising.

- Nobody wants to see a return to 'armed struggle'. It would be pointless – a United Ireland isn't anywhere near the horizon. Even if 51% of the people of the North voted tomorrow to go in with the Republic, the South isn't going to say, 'That's fantastic! We'll send the Garda up tomorrow.' Not at all! There'd be panic down South. They'd say, 'Whoa, hold on now, let's talk about this. Let's take this step by step.' The reality of a United Ireland is that it's just not on. Purely and simply the Republic couldn't afford it economically. But the Sinn Féin leaders among the 'folks on the hill' won't admit that; they're still saying that by 2016 we'll either have, or be well on the way to, a United Ireland. But that's pure propaganda.

- There is a generation which has grown up, and I don't often agree with Martin McGuinness, but he called them 'conflict junkies'. I think there are people who are addicted to conflict. It has been their whole way of life and they just can't turn away from it. Any serious logical analysis of the situation will tell you that a return to 'armed struggle' is absolutely daft, absolutely daft! Why would you love your country so much that you want to blow it up? That the greatest asset it has is its young people, yet you want to see them go into graves and into prisons? Those days are over. But, unfortunately, there are people who just don't want to change. They don't see any other reason to their lives.
- The only way to stop this is to engage these people, challenge them to public debate, whatever... you've got to engage them at every possible level, with a focus particularly on the young men who are the potential foot-soldiers.
- The previous armed struggle was certainly justified, but it ran its course, for whatever reason. But, certainly, the overriding emphasis on armed action is the reason we are where we are today, because there wasn't a focus as much on popular struggle, or on a social and economic struggle, as there should have been. Obviously the national struggle took precedence, but to such an extent that it excluded other forms of struggle that possibly would have attracted people to the republican cause. There should have been a greater emphasis on social and economic issues, on putting people onto the streets, as in the tens of thousands who were involved in the Hunger Strike marches, or the tens of thousands who were involved in the Civil Rights movement. To put that amount of people onto the streets again, to show a popular expression of support for republicanism and for socialism, would have been a very powerful thing to do. I think the whole potential around that wasn't explored as much as it should have been. That is not to say that the armed struggle was unjustified in light of that, but certainly we should have had one more string to our bow than just an armed struggle.
- The media are fixated with 'armed' republicanism. But they are missing a far bigger picture. If you go into any traditional working-class republican area, whether in West Belfast, Short Strand, or Derry city right down to Newry, you will find dozens and dozens of republicans who were previously members of Sinn Féin, but are no longer members of that organisation and *don't* support armed struggle, but are involved in community projects, are involved in social and economic issues. It's not convenient for the media to point out that there is that groundswell of support for a republicanism that's radical, that's socialist, but at this time isn't proposing that we should be engaged in armed actions.
- I believe a lot of people weren't against a 'peace process'. At the time the first ceasefire was called I remember being a bit concerned about it. Because it was an open-ended ceasefire, I worried that we going to get locked into something. Which ended up happening. Then it broke down and there was another ceasefire in '97. But I remember thinking: well, if we've opted for peace, you have to give

it a go. You need to enter this new ground and explore what's going to come of it. I personally had no issue with a peace process, as long as the republican ideology was at the forefront of it. I wasn't expecting the whole watering down of republicanism. When you look back to the start of the process it was 'freedom, justice and equality'. The 'freedom' word was dropped and replaced by 'peace'. Justice is being watered down into some type of social justice. And 'equality' is just like a nation of equals or 'parity of esteem'. If you were to look at each Sinn Féin Ard Fheis from about '94 right up, and read the banners used as backdrops behind the main platform, you'd see the subtle change of emphasis, with certain words disappearing one by one. It was all a watering down of republican goals. But at the same time, I think people were *for* a peace process, to see where it would get us, but without republicanism being watered down.

- I and a small number of other people argued strongly, inside both Sinn Féin and the IRA, that there *was* a peace option, which was contained in a document called 'TUAS: the Tactical Use of Armed Struggle' – which is a misnomer because the original document was 'Tactical Use *and Non-Use* of Armed Struggle'. And that document was composed inside the H-Blocks and sent outside. And then it was modified and adapted by the Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle. And I think it is a sound enough document in its entirety, but not once you begin to cherry-pick. The thrust of it was that in order to maintain a republican presence, even within an unfinished national liberation struggle, you had to take up the mantle of *opposition*, rather than the mantle of *coalition*. Once you take up the mantle of coalition then you do exactly what it says on the tin: you administer British rule in this part of Ireland.

- The Republican Socialist Movement (IRSP/INLA), after much debate and soul-searching, arrived at the conclusion that the conditions no longer existed for an 'armed struggle'. Now, it is not our task to persuade or convince others to follow us, they must make up their own minds in that regard. We were at the coalface for many a day and do not believe that continuing armed resistance would have brought us any nearer our goal. What we are now saying is: let's try a different road. Let's try to unite the Irish working class, let's try to embrace the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community. We would say to those currently engaged in armed actions that it's only a matter of time before more people are killed – and how will that further the needs of the Irish working class? In 2010 the world is in crisis as a new world order tries to impose itself on people. All over the world workers are taking to the streets and saying, 'No, this isn't right.' We should be doing the same. The problem our people face now is far bigger than any age-old dispute between England and Ireland; it is now American and European capitalism which threatens the wellbeing of ordinary people everywhere.

Others were more ambivalent about 'armed struggle'.

- People keep trotting out the same rhetoric, that 'armed struggle doesn't pay,

it doesn't work'. But the history of this statelet shows that it *does*. The state itself was founded because the original Ulster Volunteer Force threatened armed resistance. The changes in things like gerrymandering and housing were brought about by an armed campaign. So armed resistance has been an integral part of this statelet. Now, we're trying to get beyond that, and we're trying to put it on a footing whereby we don't have to look at the prospect of armed struggle skipping a generation and then recurring. Especially given that the contradictions which brought that armed struggle into being in the first place still exist.

- I don't believe that you will ever put the British militarily out of Ireland. At the same time, it still takes the hard, cutting edge of an armed struggle to actually get the British to listen. I mean, the most successful IRA operation – in terms of its impact on the British – was the bombing of the Baltic Exchange at Canary Wharf. Because it hit *other* interests as opposed to just being another part of the old Irish-British war.
- The notion of a 'return to armed struggle' implies that it has ended. It hasn't, there hasn't been an ending of armed struggle. What there has been is a cessation of the IRA's campaign. But we are still being harassed and stopped by the Brits and the PSNI.
- I feel that the armed struggle could have gone on for another ten years and that would have really put the Brits under pressure. But it didn't and now I think the British government have a stronger hold over this country than they ever had. For now Sinn Féin is doing everything to hold on to power, but not doing anything to get rid of the Brits.

The Protestant community and a shared future

All the interviewees felt a real desire to engage with working-class Protestants and Unionists.

- We know that there is an awful lot of hurt within the Protestant community, as there is within ours. Nobody is going to run on to the streets and throw their arms round each other at this stage. It is a slow feeling-out of each other's positions and seeing if there are issues we can work on together. And there are many such issues: community development and regeneration, trying to get young people employment, housing issues.... We would be saying to people in the Protestant community: you are what you are – you can label yourself Unionist, British, Loyalist, whatever. We label ourselves Republicans, Socialists. So that's all okay, now let's think about the next generation. If you want your sons, or grandsons, to end up in jail or be shot dead, that's your choice, but we don't want ours to be. So let's try and work together. I don't think there will be a great coming together at the minute, but there is an awakening within the Protestant community that

they too have been shafted by the very establishment that they were loyal to for so long. They must realise that fact when they look around their communities. Take East Belfast – it has been decimated. No Ropeworks, no Sirocco Works, no Mackies, and little left of Harland & Wolff. Surely many of them must be saying to themselves: hold on, we were loyal to Britain and look at what has been done to us. Certainly, they obviously have deep concerns about republicanism, and even socialism, and will be very apprehensive about any engagement. We acknowledge that and all we will be saying to them is: look, this is what we are about, we don't have all the answers, but would you like to sit down and begin a dialogue in the interests of our two communities?

- I think that at a grassroots level, with issues and campaigns around housing or provision of amenities or against cuts in public services, there's more than enough potential and scope for people from working-class unionist areas and people from working-class nationalist areas, to co-operate, to share experiences – to join the dots, effectively. Now, whether that leads to a broader campaign of social cohesion between Protestant and Catholic working-class people has to be seen. Throughout the history of the Six County state, any time there seems to have been a potential shift in terms of cross-religious co-operation, it has been effectively smashed by the Unionist establishment. Nor should it be forgotten that the Catholic Church had a major role to play in that too. And in the 1930s probably the biggest cross-community struggle since the Dockers' Strike in 1907 – the Outdoor Relief struggle† – was destroyed by the Unionist political class and the Catholic Church, and then was swiftly followed by a pogrom. In the Six Counties any time there is an attempt at cross-religious solidarity it is quickly followed by sectarian violence, usually provoked by those who prefer to see people at each others' throats because that leaves them in power. We always need to be mindful of the power of the people who are keeping the working classes apart.
- I wouldn't be so naive to say that an accommodation with the Protestant community is going to happen in ten or fifteen years. We recognise that it's a long, hard slog. There's a lot of mistrust, there's a lot of hurt, there's a lot of very deep-rooted concern – on both sides. You also have people there with an agenda, whether they be the securocrats or those in Whitehall, or whoever, who will constantly try to thwart any accommodation being achieved, for they don't want this place to change. However, when you look at what is happening now, and the cuts which will be imposed on the working class over the next four years by this Tory government, it also presents an opportunity for the working class to get together and make their voices heard. But, unfortunately, there is also an apathy and a weariness. We're coming out of thirty years of conflict and people are tired. They are disillusioned with politicians and politics.

† The Outdoor Relief marches and subsequent riots of 1932 were (in the initial stages) remarkable for their absence of sectarianism. Up to 30,000 Protestant and Catholic workers banded together to fight for better conditions.

The potential for an eventual engagement on everyday issues was nowhere better revealed than by the fact that working-class Protestants had shown themselves willing to seek assistance from Republican Sinn Féin:

- We get Protestants contact us seeking help with benefit and housing problems, or DLA. Now most of them are afraid to come into our office here, so we do what we can for them over the phone. But we've got people rehoused on the Shankill, we've got repairs done there, we've helped get flats for young ones in Lisburn and in Taughmonagh. We don't care what religion people are; to us it only matters that they need help.

If a 'cross-community' engagement could be established on shared socio-economic needs, differences of culture were felt to be surmountable.

- I don't, and have never, flown a Tricolour outside my house on Easter Sunday. I don't have any great emotional attachment to the Tricolour or to Amhrán na bhFiann [Irish national anthem]. I would have more of an attachment to James Connolly's flag, the workers' flag, the Starry Plough†. Not because I am a Republican Socialist, but because of what it stands for: for the working class of which I am a member. It stands for people trying to fight against capitalism to create better working and living conditions. But if there was no Tricolour in the morning, or Amhrán na bhFiann, I really wouldn't feel as if my world was falling apart. If someone asks me if I'm Irish I say: I was born in the north of Ireland, I am an Ulsterman, and yes, I have this affinity to the island in which I was born and I can trace back generations of my family to the west coast. Anyway, in historical terms, just who is pure Irish? Is there anybody pure anything? More importantly – does it matter! During Christmas 2009 three homeless people died from exposure on the streets of Belfast, and things are getting worse. The 'cuts' are coming in and that will really hurt the working class. Neither a Tricolour nor a Union Jack is going to put bread on your table, is not going to help your sick parents, or educate your children. Connolly and Larkin foresaw all that. They knew that the real dividing line was not between the Irish and the British, but between the exploiters and the exploited.

- Republicans used to say that the reason Protestants were hesitant to move close to them was because they were fearful of losing their identity. But I think it works both ways. Take integrated education. I know many republicans and nationalists who are afraid of losing out if we have integrated education. 'We'll lose our Irishness, our Republicanism.' That sounds like weakness to me. We are quite confident that by moving closer to the Protestant community we will *all* gain.

- Everyone is afraid that the 'other' crowd ultimately want to turn us into 'them',

† The Starry Plough banner was originally used by the Irish Citizen Army. James Connolly said that the significance of the banner was that a free Ireland would control its own destiny, from the plough to the stars.

or a compliant version of them. But we have to make it clear that everyone can hold on to their culture and aspirations as long as they want to. We have to say to Protestants that they can be British for as long as they want, no matter what changes take place in Ireland.

- We also have to consider: if the time comes when there could be a United Ireland will there still be a Great Britain? It's not inconceivable that in twenty years' time there will be an independent Scotland. If what once constituted Great Britain is eventually dissolved, new relationships will undoubtedly be forged between both islands.
- The Provos still do not accept the fact that their campaign was sectarian. They're actually now trying to say that it was a class struggle all the time. Well, I don't know too many working-class Protestants who would feel that way. The Provos fought against the 'British presence in Ireland', but what *is* the British presence in Ireland? It's the million people who live on this island who consider themselves British – and that's who they, by and large, attacked. They attacked the Protestant community, their emblems and their symbols.
- Sectarianism is the biggest problem we face and we need to begin to break it down. When I mention sectarianism to Sinn Féin, they get really angry: 'Our war was not sectarian!' But I respond that everybody is sectarian. I am sectarian; we're all sectarian to a degree. We need to understand where it comes from and begin to eradicate it.

The way forward

Although all the interviewees understood that a closer focus on 'the way forward' was to be one of the main topics tackled during follow-up discussions/pamphlets, some pertinent comments on this theme were made.

- We need to start talking together about the future. Somebody has to start that debate. We can't afford to let things slip back again; we cannot allow another generation to go through what our generation went through. There are people who want to live through it all again – they are crazy! I know young lads who live on the Garvaghy Road today – seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old – and when you talk to them, do you know what their ambition is? They want to go to jail. They think they missed the craic because their da's or their uncles told them about the great time they had in Long Kesh. What kind of a society have we got that we breed young people whose ambition in life is to go to prison! I gave a copy of that pamphlet, about the experience of family members[†], to young people

[†] Island Pamphlet No. 95, 'Time stands still': *the forgotten story of prisoners' families*. Available as a free download from <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/islandpublications/>

in Portadown. And I said to them: ‘See when you go to prison, your family goes to prison with you.’ Some of them did read parts of it and were shocked. They said to me, ‘I didn’t know it was like that for the families. My uncle hadn’t said anything about all that; he had just talked about such and such.’ And I said, ‘That’s all right, but now go and ask your aunt what life was like for *her* when your uncle was inside.’ So some of these young lads are beginning to think about things a bit deeper. I defy anybody who has lived through the conflict, and was involved in the conflict, to sit and read that particular pamphlet and not be moved by it. Even in my own case, I didn’t realise what my parents went through, and I never spoke to them about it. It was just something that was never mentioned. At the end of the day, your parents raise you, they do the best they can for you – but they don’t expect you to end up in prison, or be in your grave before them.

- Not everything that came out of the past thirty years of conflict was necessarily a bad thing. An awful lot of cohesion and solidarity was built up in working-class republican areas, which grew out of thirty years of basically acting on their own initiative and outside of the parameters of the northern state, setting up everything from schools to transport initiatives, to newspapers, to radio stations – an unbelievable amount of stuff. All the experience that was built up, the self-confidence, the sense of solidarity, should be celebrated, and should be built upon. And to harness that potential – it hasn’t been completely lost – to reinvigorate it, would be the most important task for republicans in working-class areas. You can see it happening, you can see sprouts of it, with all the different community initiatives. I think we should be engaging in a more popular type struggle. Basically, catapulting issues to the fore, and to an extent it did happen here with the campaign around Orange marches, for demilitarisation and the release of political prisoners; these all brought significant numbers of people onto the streets in acts of civil disobedience. But maybe the idea should be broached that as well as doing these acts of disobedience on specific issues like sectarian marches or prisoners, why not mobilise people with a demand for national independence, and an end to Partition? And that’s what *éirígí’s* about – building that popular in-your-face demand for independence, with acts of direct action with civil disobedience and putting thousands of people onto the streets. It remains to be seen if that’s going to be possible in the short term but certainly we think that is the best chance of success in the long term, building something like that with solid foundations and from the ground up.

- The Forum that we [Official Republican Movement] suggest could become the venue for progressive discussion and debate on non-sectarian politics. We would hope that it would attract people from all our communities. And even if the participants retained historical suspicions of one another, at least by accepting that people’s *quality of life* was the priority, and by addressing shared concerns, it might create the situation where people say: okay, we might have quite different

long-term political aspirations, but we can agree on points about the health service, housing, crime or youth unemployment...

- Of course the national aspirations of both communities must be openly debated, and the feasibility of these beliefs examined. Could there be an independent socialist Ireland in the future, and if so what sort of timescale? Can Northern Ireland remain, as Thatcher said, “as British as Finchley”? Indeed, was it ever? Will the UK exist in years to come? What could or should be the future relationship between these islands on the western edge of Europe? There has to be a new way forward, we must begin to think of ideas that were unthinkable in the past.
- I think the next ten years will see radical change right across the two islands. I think people will eventually begin to resist these cuts that the coalition government thinks it can impose. And as that resistance gains momentum many people will be asking the question: can we move forward on a class-based agenda here? And many republicans too will be asking: can we use this opportunity to reinvigorate and redefine Republicanism?
- Another big issue is: what’s happening with our young people? Where do they fit in with what we are doing and why isn’t there that groundswell of today’s young people becoming politicised?
- A lot of young people were turned off by Sinn Féin’s approach. Sinn Féin would call meetings with young people but instead of allowing them to say what they wanted, Sinn Féin were telling them what way to go. Young people don’t like that, so they just don’t get involved. We need to touch base with young people. We need to politicise them more. But it has to be interactive, not some academic exercise – we need to genuinely work with them. They see how we were betrayed, and they don’t want to be betrayed by *us*. It is all a trust thing. How do we get them back into the Movement? This is going to be a long process, but we need to bring in our young people, for they are the key to the future.
- It may be the case that what you’re planning to do [the pamphlet debate] will help dispel the myth that any republicans who don’t agree with Sinn Féin must be mad crazy dissidents. We’re not, and that scares them more than anything. If a reasonable voice comes out of it, all that demonisation that has gone on will be blown out of the water.
- I think it’s a disgrace that Sinn Féin never showed any interest in engaging with you on this pamphlet. It’s also a real snub to an organisation like Farset, which has a long track record of working at the grassroots, with *all* communities. Sinn Féin really *should* engage – for to ignore dialogue is totally counter-productive to whatever they are hoping to achieve. *We all* need to be engaged in this debate, and their position needs to be heard and debated as much as anyone else’s.

Appendix

After asking a leading member of Sinn Féin how to go about soliciting the organisation's involvement in this pamphlet, I was informed that all requests had to be submitted in writing to the Belfast Executive. However, I followed this route without any success, for none of the following (hand-delivered) letters received an acknowledgement let alone a response.

13 July 2010

Bobby Storey, Chair

Belfast Executive Sinn Féin

Dear Bobby Storey

On behalf of Farset Community Think Tanks Project, I wish to submit a request for Sinn Féin to be involved in a discussion around the theme 'Irish Republicanism Now'. The proposal is outlined on the attached page; but first I feel I should provide you with some background on myself and my project.

Ever since my involvement in the People's Democracy in 1968-70 I have been engaged in community action of one sort or another.

During the time I worked for the NSPCC I set out to develop a 'community-orientated approach to social work' and established productive linkages with numerous community groups in and around Belfast.

On behalf of the Dutch children's charity, Pax Christi Kinderhulp (who were working in collaboration with NSPCC) I helped to set up Kinder Community House, Killough, Co. Down, and acted as its voluntary co-ordinator for seven years.

I was involved in the Rathcoole Self-Help Group and helped them establish contact with Conway Mill and Springhill Community House.

In 1993, under the imprint of Island Publications, I launched my series of *Island Pamphlets*, the purpose of which is to stimulate and inform a community-wide debate on historical, cultural, political and socio-economic issues. Very soon the pamphlets began to focus on the deliberations of small, informal gatherings of individuals – the 'Community Think Tanks' – who came together to explore issues relevant to their everyday lives. With the administrative support of Farset Youth & Community Development Project, and with EU Peace funding, Farset Community Think Tanks Project was eventually established. The Think Tanks have embraced (on both a 'single identity' and a cross-community basis) Republicans, Loyalists, community activists, women's groups, victims, cross-border workers, ex-prisoners, young people, senior citizens and others. The discussions are recorded, then an agreed, edited version is published in pamphlet form.

Many of the pamphlets have been available in the Green Cross Art & Bookshop. Tom Hartley is very familiar with the pamphlet series, and with some of my work at community level.

To date 95 pamphlets have been produced (containing within them 1.4 million words of oral testimony) and 180,400 pamphlets have been widely disseminated (free of charge) among community groups, political parties, funders and policy-makers.

I have included along with this submission three sample pamphlets, to give some idea of the process of engagement and the final product.

I am quite willing to come along and answer any questions should further clarification be required.

Looking forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely

Michael Hall

18 October 2010

Bobby Storey, Chair

Belfast Executive Sinn Féin

Dear Bobby Storey

Over three months ago I wrote to you requesting Sinn Féin's participation in a forthcoming pamphlet. (My letter, along with sample pamphlets, was delivered to Tom Hartley, but addressed to yourself.)

I haven't heard from anyone since then and I was wondering whether Sinn Féin had been able to consider my request, and, if so, what their decision was. I attach a new overview of the project. There is no basic change except that I have added a few questions to the initial list.

If you recall, in my proposal I asked that each participating organisation either submit the answers to these questions in writing, or, in the event that they were too busy to undertake this, I would interview someone delegated to speak on the organisation's behalf.

Most of the other organisations have opted for an interview. Maybe this would suit Sinn Féin too, and perhaps someone like Tom could be delegated to speak on Sinn Féin's behalf? The interview would only take half an hour. Could I assure you again of the integrity of the process. My draft of the interview would go back and forth until the final version met with Sinn Féin's approval. I am neither a journalist nor an academic; I am solely motivated by a desire to facilitate open and honest debate and dialogue at all levels within this society.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Michael Hall

[copy to Tom Hartley]

08 November 2010

Bobby Storey, Chair

Belfast Executive Sinn Féin

Dear Bobby Storey

I am disappointed that I have received neither an acknowledgement nor a response to my letters of 13 July and 18 October. There has been a lot of interest in the proposed publications and a number of interviews have already taken place with different Republican organisations.

At each of these meetings I have been asked whether Sinn Féin will be participating, and I respond that I am hopeful that they will be, but not certain. To this, I invariably get a similar

response: ‘Don’t hold your breath. They’re not interested in engaging in dialogue.’

I genuinely hope that this is not the case. By bringing the ‘war’ to an end and reaching an accommodation with political adversaries, Sinn Féin took – particularly within the context of Republican politics – a difficult and courageous step, and I would really like to see the Sinn Féin position presented in the pamphlets, even if it was confined to the first pamphlet, where I am not asking people to sit down together, but simply answer a few questions during a one-to-one interview.

Furthermore, I strive to avoid placing any person/organisation who participates, or is mentioned prominently, in my pamphlets at any disadvantage, and my concern is that Sinn Féin will do this themselves, by default. The pamphlets are not only disseminated widely within the community and policy-making sectors here, but sent to universities in the US and Europe.

Anyway, I repeat my request to be permitted to interview a Sinn Féin spokesperson. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Michael Hall

[copy to Tom Hartley]

08 December 2010

Bobby Storey, Chair

Belfast Executive Sinn Féin

Dear Bobby Storey

I am disappointed that I have received neither an acknowledgement nor a response to any of my previous letters (of 13 July, 18 October and 8 November).

As it now seems evident that Sinn Féin have no intention of participating in a ‘pamphlet debate’, I just wanted to clarify the position this has left me in.

When the pamphlet is published, the omission of a Sinn Féin contribution – especially when the focus is on ‘Irish Republicanism now’ – will look very odd. Furthermore, if questions are asked as to *why* there is no Sinn Féin contribution, two possible scenarios have been suggested to me:

- Sinn Féin might claim that they were not encouraged to participate.
- Sinn Féin might say that they declined to participate because they believed that the pamphlets were tied in to a ‘dissident’ agenda – which you know is not the case.

As either of these two possibilities would cast doubts over the integrity of my project, an integrity which I greatly value and have worked hard to maintain, I feel I will have little option but to replicate my letters in the pages which I had originally set aside for Sinn Féin’s response.

I am still prepared to include a Sinn Féin submission, but as it is now long past my deadline for recording, transcribing and editing interviews, I would require a written response to the original six questions by no later than one calendar month from today (that is, by 08.01.11).

Yours sincerely

Michael Hall

[copy to Tom Hartley]