

NEW IRELAND GROUP:



**CONVERGING
to
A NEW ALL INCLUSIVE
IRELAND?**

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Fundamental change: Republican and Nationalist self-confidence; Loyalist and Unionist alienation

As a result of so much improving socio-political change throughout Ireland it is not surprising that the enthusiasm for a de-partitioned New Ireland seems to have waned.

Because of the newfound strength in the economy of the Republic and the increasing self confidence and rising self-esteem which has evolved as a result, most Southern Irish people seem no longer to feel resentful at being denied what their forbears had sought-Home Rule (1886,1893,1914) or an Independent All-Ireland Republic (1798,1803,1916,1918,1937).

During this 90th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, prominent public figures have highlighted the many achievements of the Republic of Ireland-in sport, culture, in the economy and politically. Both at home and internationally, the influence of Ireland-and of being Irish-has swept across the world in unprecedented manner in recent times. Furthermore, the Irish diaspora has expanded, through culture and political acumen, to form a novel form of global empire without recourse to guns or cannon.

The Irish Republic's influence in the wider world is both considerable and significant and this after only 84 years since the foundation of the state, 69 since it adopted a Republican Constitution and 58 since it repealed its External Relations Act which had held it within the Commonwealth under the crown. In short, the citizens of the 26 County Irish Republic have developed such confidence in themselves and their future that they no longer struggle with 'partition'.

It could also be said that the Catholic minority in the North of Ireland, at least amongst its middle class, has now become sufficiently comfortable and secure, to have lost any compelling desire to end partition. On the other hand, Unionists have allowed themselves to be led into a political and constitutional cul-de-sac. Nevertheless, we believe that it is by breaking out of their Partition Mindset that they are likely to regain lost confidence and self-esteem. This they would surely achieve were they to offer what they have in plenty: courage and determination as a basis of their potential for leadership in the creation of a truly New Ireland.

It is in communities of social deprivation where feelings of marginalization and alienation are most acutely felt that disaffection is still sustaining the hope (among republicans) and the fear (among Unionists) of de-partition.

Anxiety in this respect remains highest in those working class Loyalist communities in which so little had been done to develop self-confidence and self-esteem during the hey-day of Ulster Unionism. Consequently, the recent drive to promote individual and collective community development in communities and 'pockets' suffering from social deprivation, must be commended. In this respect, the presence of so many community representatives from Loyalist' community associations at a recent Reconciliation Networking Forum in Dublin Castle (July 27th-28th) is extremely encouraging for better understanding in our future.

Catch Up

'Catch up' is a phrase now heard in Loyalist communities and it is not without significance.

Firstly: it acknowledges that Republican communities have moved ahead because they have been better led, better organized, and as a result, have become more coherent politically. Since 1968, they seemed better prepared, better informed and more articulate, more ready and able to take advantage of whatever was on offer from the Home Governments, from the USA and from Europe.

Secondly: 'Catch up' is an indication of a positive desire to move forward, to learn and to benefit from the experience of those who are ahead in these respects. It would be hoped that, as one of the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement, a functioning Assembly will encourage evolving social and economic benefit for the many disadvantaged local communities which struggle to change the social reality of their members for the better.

So why then should members of the New Ireland Group along with others still work for the de-partition of the island? The remainder of the sections of this thesis will endeavor to respond to that question.

The Age-old Anglo-Irish Sectarian Conflict

Preventing Recurrence

Convergence A Challenge For Unionist Leadership

So why, indeed should members of the New Ireland Group along with others still work for the de-partition of the island?

To an extent we are driven by the lessons of history which oblige us to look beyond the expediency of yet another patch-up to 'do us our time'. We also believe that we who live in Ulster have not only much to look forward to in union with the rest of Ireland but also that we have much that is positive to give to the overall future development of our island community, that each, the people of Ulster and the people of the rest of Ireland, would be enriched by increasing political, economic, cultural and entrepreneurial interaction with the other.

However valuable the Good Friday Agreement has been in opening up movement throughout Ireland, however valuable it has been in demonstrating how much we might learn from each other, we should now be trying to accept that the clock will not be turned back and that, like it or not, many of us will live to be part of the building of a truly New Ireland. For this we would be wise to consider the need to devise an entirely new constitution to which we could all give our allegiance.

Recurrent sectarian violence has left a legacy of regret, remorse and guilt among violators: resentment, anger and reaction with thoughts of revenge among the violated. To deal with such responses, people who have been affected may well resort to use of falsehood, in order to justify what they have done to each other so that they may live with themselves.

We might do worse than pause to consider that 'our attitudes may have been responsible for their actions'. Historic wounds are lodged deep in the psyche of our folk consciousness. Let us look in the mirror before we point the finger and then point the finger and look in the mirror again!

Over many years, members of the New Ireland Group have endeavoured to raise awareness of the need for a redemptive dimension to enter the search for the resolution of our long-standing divisions. Such consideration inevitably raises questions about restorative justice and the experience of the Truth and Reconciliation processes carried out in Peru, South Africa and elsewhere. By transcending the past through a redemptive healing of the wounds that were inflicted in it, we are surely more likely to build a fresh start for a new future to be shared for the good of all-together.

Recurring Conflict

Anyone who might doubt that the Anglo-Irish, Irish sectarian conflict has been a recurring one should ponder on the record of our history and also on the bitter legacy which it has left in families, communities and neighbourhoods. To imagine that patch-up could ever be sufficient to prevent recurrence at some time in the future, seems to be flying in the face of past experience and historical evidence.

A recurrent conflict: some historical evidence

To illustrate the recurrent experience of the violent sectarian-socio-political conflict between England and Ireland and between the sectarian tribes in Ireland, we might start with the Battle of the Yellow Ford (1598) even though our history records conflict long before that particular event.

Fearing invasion of Ireland by Spanish forces, Queen Elizabeth had been trying to subdue the people of Ulster by subtle means rather than by force.

However, Hugh O'Neill, the Earl of Tyrone, saw that the spread of English law and English administration in Munster and Connaught had undermined the basis of local independence there; initially, he seems to have thought that Ulster might be allowed to remain Gaelic. Only when he came to realize that the process of Anglicisation threatened Ulster also, did he prepare for armed resistance.

In this context, the English Government was becoming alarmed at the prospect of growth in O'Neill's power and it could not ignore the possibility of Spanish attack, with Ulster instead of Munster as the first objective. Matters came to a head at the Battle of the Yellow Ford when O'Neill won a great victory over the English.

Rebellion hitherto confined to the North, now spread over the whole country. When 4000 Spanish troops landed at Kinsale, Elizabeth felt obliged to react and so she did, besieging the Spaniards at Kinsale and then defeating O'Neill's and O'Donnell's forces who had besieged the English. The Irish army made a tactical retreat to Ulster. By that time, Mountjoy, the English deputy lieutenant, who had set up garrisons there, was able to wear down any remaining resistance by O'Neill's returning forces.

Under the custom of 'surrender' (to the monarch or the monarch's representative) followed by 're-granting' (under the monarch's 'protection'), O'Neill, who must have been greatly demoralized, indicated in early 1603 that he was ready to make such submission.

In spite of receiving the news that the Queen had died, Mountjoy, the Queen's deputy in Ireland, received O'Neill, who made abject submission on 30th March, not knowing that he was 'submitting' to a Monarch who was dead! Even though the terms of 're-grant' seem, in their description, reasonable and relatively generous, the morale of both O'Neill and O'Donnell must have suffered as power and influence seeped away from them.

English conquest was followed by increasing English control, justified no doubt, on the pretext of 'civilizing the natives' or alternatively by 'Right of Conquest', a phrase, thankfully now no longer acceptable. Eventually, not able to bear any more any longer, O'Neill and O'Donnell, with around 100 supporters, left Ireland for good on 14th September 1607. They embarked on a ship at Rathmullan on Lough Swilly. Though bound originally for Spain, bad weather forced them to land instead in Normandy.

The Flight of the Earls marked the end of the old Gaelic order and this soon became regarded as a national disaster in the folk consciousness of the people.

The events in Ireland at the end of the 16th Century, beginning of the 17th Century, were exacerbated in the plantation of Ulster by people arriving with passionate conviction for the 'new' religion which in its style and practice, marked them out as different. In the face of all that had already taken place, the possibility of a desirable assimilation was unlikely; sadly, there are still people today – 400 years further on – who retain negative attitudes to such.

Instead, the frustrated aspiration of the dispossessed majority of Irish people was pitted against the threatened supremacy of an insecure minority, forever fearful of the possibility of 'role reversal'. Furthermore, the dispossessed Irish majority felt that it couldn't obtain redress for injustice and so, just like others in similar situation, it resorted to violence to overthrow those who were suppressing them. In turn, this threatened the tenuous hold of the incoming 'planters' who were equally determined to defend, just as relentlessly, what they had acquired.

The defeat of 'Catholic Ireland' at the beginning of the 17th Century was compounded by further defeats in 1649 and 1690 (three defeats in the century) with reaction in the form of the 1641 Rising and the Siege of Derry in 1689, which two events have left scars on the consciousness of our people to this day.

With the restoration of the English Monarchy in 1660, Irish Catholics again looked forward to the recovery of their lands. In spite of promises made by the new king Charles II, an Act of Settlement did little to ameliorate the bitterness of those who had been deprived of their land. In 1641, Catholic landowners had held 60% of the land. Following the restoration of the Monarchy on whose side they had fought against Cromwellian forces, they were left with little more than 20% and some authorities have recorded a figure as low as 10%.

In Ireland it seemed that there was a battle between people who were hoping to regain their land and lose their second-class citizenship against those who were determined to hold onto the land and the Ascendancy that gave them the means of keeping it.

The Recurring Conflict

'Patch up', Insufficient

After the defeats of the 17th Century, the indigenous people alongside disenchanted Presbyterians were subjected by the ecclesiastical and Anglified establishment, to the oppressive laws of the Penal code. Even though the governing powers had not the resources to carry them out consistently and even though the Irish Parliament in Dublin (Grattan's) tried hard to introduce legislation to ameliorate the more severe discriminating manifestations of the Code, there was much underlying unrest.

In respect of such amelioration, the greatest victory of the Irish parliamentarians will forever be stamped on our history in their encouragement of the English Parliament to pass an act in January 1782 which;

"affirmed in the strongest terms, that the complete legislative and judicial independence of Ireland should be established and ascertained forever, and ...at no time hereafter be questioned or questionable."

In spite of this enactment, such independence lasted only 18 years before being overtaken by the Act of Union of 1801.

Feelings of being alien in one's own country or in one's place of domicile came inexorably to a head in the 1790s and this resulted in the Rising of the United Irishmen led by Wolfe Tone and not far behind him, Henry Joy McCracken and Henry Munro. To this day there are Presbyterian families in Northern Ireland who remain quietly proud that former ancestors were 'out' in 1798. They had become founders of Irish Republicanism.

Enter the 19th Century

Disturbed by the cruel methods used to suppress the rebellion, sickened in general by violence and its effects, believing that their clergy had been brought 'on-side' by the British government's granting of Regium Donum of £1,200 per annum, (presumably to increase the likelihood of them exerting a calming and controlling influence on their respective congregations) and increasingly disillusioned by the barbarity of the French Revolution, the Presbyterian United Irishmen folded their tents. The revolution had ended in failure and it could be said that, in general, the Irish Presbyterian leadership was persuaded to encourage its followers to forsake the use, if not the threat, of violence, for political purpose in Ireland.

The 19th Century started with an abortive attempt by Robert Emmet to revive the United Irishmen and their struggle but this petered out quite quickly. He was executed on Thomas Street in Dublin. 'The Man from God Knows Where', Thomas Russell, born into the Church of Ireland, although later, for a short time, Presbyterian, gave Emmet his full support but he too was to be hanged outside the old jail in Downpatrick.

In conjunction with Daniel O'Connell's robust championship of Catholic emancipation and the fact that he was campaigning all over the country for the first 29 years of the 19th century, he no doubt stimulated the latent as well as the real fears of the Protestant minority, putting them on high alert. It was probably around that time that this minority began to fear that the evolving Ireland would be one dominated by Roman Catholicism.

The further recurrent nature of our conflict has been highlighted by Andrew Boyd in his book; *Holy War in Belfast*. Belfast had vicious sectarian rioting by the decade since the 1830s, reaching peaks of inflammation whenever the Unionist people felt most threatened by change, namely at times of the Home Rule debates and discussions – 1886, 1893, 1912-1914. On top of these there were the Tithe Wars of the 1830s, the Smith O'Brien skirmish of the 1840s, the decade that also experienced the raising of the social and political temperature as a result of The Great Famine. In the 1850s, there was an attempt by Charles Gavin Duffy to re-form the United Irish Movement under the flag of an All Ireland Tenant's League.

The Fenian Movement emerged in the 1860s culminating in the failed Rising of 1867, yet leading to the creation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood which withdrew all support from the parliamentary movement for Home Rule.

In the 1870s, the Protestant barrister, Isaac Butt, formed the Home Rule Movement. The 1880s saw the rise of Parnellism and also the Land War (1879-1882) inspired in particular by Michael Davitt. The First Home Rule bill was defeated in the House of Commons in 1886; in spite of its defeat, Belfast experienced its worst sectarian riots to date.

In the 1890s, a further attempt to enact a Home Rule bill was this time passed in the House of Commons but defeated in the House of Lords. The customary rioting took place yet again in Belfast! The third Home Rule bill was passed in 1914 in the House of Commons but the House of Lords, which had lost the power to veto bills, could only, under the Parliament Act, postpone its enactment.

The First World War (1914-1918) postponed further its enactment and gradually during this long journey to some form of independence, 'partition' had crept into the political lexicon. The UVF had formed and, in response, the National Volunteers, which then divided into the National Volunteers who followed the call of John Redmond to serve with the Crown forces during the Great War. Those who wouldn't follow his call, became the Irish Volunteers, many members of which were to play a part in the 1916 Rising, the Anglo-Irish war of 1919-1921 and, following that, as part of the Republican Army (Irregulars) in the Irish Civil War (1922-1923). Meanwhile, vicious sectarianism continued north of the border that had partitioned Ireland.

As James Connolly had predicted, there was to be 'a carnival of reaction on both sides of the dividing line' and so to 1968-1969. Who will gainsay that we should now strive to build a de-partitioned and independent New Ireland?

The New Unionist: Union with the Irish People as a whole or foundations for a New Ireland in a New Era

Space and Participation

In the early 1970s, a New Ireland Movement was convened in order to provide an empathetic space for people from North and South, Catholic and Protestant who had been born into either the Unionist or Nationalist tradition or with family relating to both, yet who did not feel comfortable in any of the contemporary political parties. In particular, we emphasized that we would strive to develop ideas and promote discourse which might transcend the past; in so doing we wished to point the way towards the foundation of a truly New Ireland.

Early on the distinction was made between the vision of a New Ireland and that of a United Ireland. For us, the United Ireland that seemed to be on offer all those 35 years ago was one in which the North would be absorbed into an extension of the 26 Southern counties. A New Ireland, on the other hand, would be one with structures that would invite the participation of all the people in its formulation. Back then, in the minds of many of the Irish minority (the Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist people of the North) United Ireland implied a backward economy, an unacceptable theocracy and a cultural dominance from which those of the Irish minority tradition felt alienated. In short, the latter feared a significant loss of their identity and a severe downturn in their standard of living.

A New Ireland, however, would hold aloft the vision of a program designed to empower each citizen through a policy of individual and collective community development expanded through networking. With increasing self confidence, change, which is inevitable, could be perceived more and more as a challenge rather than as a threat.

The political climate and street violence of the 1970s was not, however, conducive to such ideas becoming acceptable to the people at large. This was especially so among the Unionist section who still felt they should cling on to their attachment to Britain. After all, they felt secure under the umbrella of British symbolism, confident that Britain was governed by a class of people who would never let them down.

The New Ireland Movement became conscious that the political realities of the 1970s were indeed not favourable to considering the challenge of de-partitioning. Nevertheless, the Movement remained convinced that the historical conflict would keep recurring just as long as the island remained partitioned. In one of its earliest pamphlets, *New Ireland: sell out or opportunity?* (1972), the words of the Duke of Ormond (1660) are quoted: “*There must be new discoveries made of a New Ireland, the old will not serve to satisfy these engagements*”. In the New Ireland Group, we have done our best to keep the faith.

Thought for the day and the dormant volcano

When referring to the state of Northern Ireland on a BBC ‘Thought for the day’, a analogy was used of a volcano following an eruption and how it had become quiescent. People who lived in its vicinity could persuade themselves that the volcano was now ‘dead’; nevertheless, he warned that it might better be described as dormant. His warning seemed to suggest that as long as partition persisted and Ireland was not independent, our conflict, however well patched up, would merely remain dormant. At some stage, peace and reconciliation must surely involve what seems inevitable, namely de-partition and independence in a New Ireland.

‘Talk Back’ and New Ireland

And so, on Radio Ulster in 2005, it was riveting to listen on ‘Talk Back’ to a young man receiving a response a former Unionist Politician, in which they were both raising awareness about the potential of a truly New Ireland in the context of fresh opportunities for those of the Unionist tradition, should they be prepared to give leadership for it and subsequently use their many talents to make New Ireland become their new reality.

While the New Ireland Movement of the 1970s gradually withered on the vine, the relevance of what it had endeavoured to articulate did not.

Hunger Strike

Then came the Hunger Strike with the vicious fight to the death between Margaret Thatcher and the Republican Movement. Instead of finding a convincing means of articulating the claims of life over death, the most powerful person in Britain chose to fight a battle of wills, seeking to win, whatever the cost, as though all right could ever be on one or other side in such a *danse macabre*. If indeed it was a victory in her terms, it was soon to become a Pyrrhic victory for the Unionist people on whose side she would claim to have been.

The failure of the British establishment to come to terms with what was happening in Ireland at that time was just one stimulus for a further attempt to generate interest among those born into the Unionist tradition concerning a New Ireland, aiming to include all and exclude none: hence, the thinking behind the publication of this pamphlet.

Change: an invitation to a challenge

Much has changed in the 33 years since our predecessor, the New Ireland Movement, published the pamphlet to which we have already referred. Change has further accelerated since the present New Ireland Group was inaugurated in 1982, the year in which it issued its first leaflet with the appropriate title: Invitation to a Challenge, the challenge being intended to reawaken Irish consciousness among Unionists.

The three main pillars, on which our hope is based, remain in the further development of Consensus Democracy, Individual and Local Community Collective Development and redemptive politics whereby we may achieve atonement for what we have done to each other by attitude as well as by action in the past.

Our members have participated in debate and discussion in many of the counties of Ireland and also at social and political conferences in England and Scotland. We have published a number of pamphlets and have had many of our articles and letters published in the daily and local weekly newspapers of Ireland.

Born into the Unionist tradition: fair yet uncertain

Some time ago during an interview in the media, a local politician informed his viewing audience that many thousands of Unionists had not participated in the most recent General Election. Perhaps we shall never know if this was due to apathy, or loss of conviction.

Whatever the cause, there are many fair minded, liberal, anti-sectarian Unionists whose families have been located here for generations and who are understandably concerned about their future in Ireland. There will also be many others who, because of such uncertainty, have already gone to learn, live and work across the water. Of these it is hard to imagine, were the conditions finally settled in Ireland, that they might not wish to return to their roots. Then, there are members of the Unionist family who are concerned about the accelerating decline in the influence of Unionism and who are confused about the way in which they have lost self-esteem and patriotic pride in what was once held aloft as 'the British way of life'.

It may therefore be relevant to recall the statement appearing in the pamphlet published in 1972 by our predecessor - The New Ireland Movement:

"Almost everyone admits (to themselves) that some form of re-unification (of Ireland) is ultimately inevitable. To wait for that date and do nothing to equip ourselves or our children psychologically to cope with the possibility, let alone to participate in the changes involved, is for the Ulster Protestant an exercise in racial demoralization. It could only ensure a further decline in our numbers and sense of purpose for living on this island. Many of the alternatives might lead to the same end. Apart from being jettisoned we could continue to be controlled like adolescents by a Westminster Pro-Consul. Whenever we think about the changed England of today, should we not at least be considering most seriously the long-term value of the English connection as the means of preserving what we understand by the 'British way of life'.

It is not difficult to see how the perpetuation of unresolved conflict in a partitioned Ireland will erode the things that are precious to us in this heritage. By being perpetually on the defensive, the Ulster Unionist has, on so many occasions, allowed the initiative to pass into the hands of others. It is futile to wait to be blackmailed, coerced, spurned or even out-voted into a decision for re-unification. Such would ensure the final disillusionment of our people."

Written in 1972 and now slightly amended to relate to the changed context, the above was an attempt to issue a warning and to raise the possibility of an alternative, the vision of a truly New Ireland. We may still have a long and arduous road ahead. Go n-eiri an bother romhainn le cheile.

Invitation

There are still citizens today who were born into the Unionist tradition and who feel that they have no comfortable space in which to debate openly and seriously, controversial and dissenting viewpoints about the future of Northern Ireland and Ireland as a whole. We now invite all such people as well as others, Catholics as well as Protestants, leafy suburbs as well as housing estates, immigrants as well as indigenous, who may be uncertain, confused or bewildered, to join with us in helping to determine how Ireland will develop as this century proceeds. In this way they can seize the opportunity to place a significant mark on the future of Ulster as part of Ireland and, in so doing, create a destiny for their children and their children's children, which will endure. Most assuredly, their greatest safeguard will lie in the respect of their neighbours as they commit to building with them a new life for a new era in a New Ireland.

Ar Aghaidh Linn Le Cheile

Go hEire Nua

Forward Together to a New Ireland

Movement and Pitfalls

How then may we move in the direction of historic reconciliation in political and constitutional terms for the building of this New Ireland?

Anyone who has studied the lessons of the Balkans recent history will realize the danger of waiting for the possibility of a referendum which could lead to a result so close that more division could be created than alleviated. 51% in favour of New Ireland, 49% against it could lead us into more violence.

The Yugoslav experience teaches us that where the result of many 'democratic' referendums has sparked off a terrible litany of violence. No-one could say that we have not been warned, yet what thinking has been put into the means of coping with the possibility of such outcome of referendum which we are bound to face at some time in the future?

In its booklet: New Ireland: Sell Out or Opportunity? 30 years on and revisited, the New Ireland Group, having considered the implications of constitutional change in bringing about the New Ireland, believes that such could be achieved by taking the problems and possibilities into account at an All Ireland Constitutional Convention at which significantly important matters would be addressed.

Acceptance of the concept of a transition period meeting special requirements for its governance

This period would terminate once arrangements being put in place, were clearly felt to be acceptable to the overwhelming majority of the people. The onus would therefore be on those of us who believe in the potential of a New Ireland to ensure that those most fearful of it could grow in confidence as participants in its development.

The degree of autonomy for a 6 county Northern Ireland or a 9 county Ulster

That would be required during the transition period in relation to matters which could not be resolved overnight and also, subsequently, in relation to requirements for regional and communitarian decentralization of power. It is worth noting that Bunreacht na hEireann (The Irish Constitution), even as it stands, contains a very significant Article with two important clauses (Articles 15.1.3 and 15.2.2) which point in the direction of regional autonomy.

The British Irish Parliamentary Body

This body could be located in an institution on neutral ground such as the Isle of Man.

A Bill of Rights

The incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into the constitution of any New Ireland state; such would be a token of intent and indication of the bona fides of those striving to promote a truly New Ireland where justice and equality will prevail. To this should be added any provision on Human Rights that has been advocated and ratified as a result of the outworking of the Good Friday (Belfast) and Saint Andrews Agreements.

A Community Charter to promote devolution of economic and political power

Such a charter should ensure, within the operation of regional and national guidelines, that participation by the people would become sufficiently effective to produce action wherever they live and wherever they work. Our proposal for a Local Community Charter, includes suggestions for the development of Institutional Democracy, the convening of Open Community Fora, Community Guilds, Neighbourhood, Housing Estate and Townland Associations with evolving Networks of Association, an expanded resource of increased numbers of Citizens Advice Bureau, and a system of locally accountable taxation, aimed at closing gaps of disadvantage.

Underpinning the Economy during the Transition Period by those funding organisations and states etc which have vested interest or friendly reason to support the foundation and building of a secure New Ireland.

Explicit separation of Church and State in any New All-Ireland Constitution

We would encourage ecclesiastical, cultural, and social initiatives that are designed to build bridges of understanding and co-operation among a divided community.

We propose the replacement of the present Irish constitution with a new one, arising from the deliberations of an All-Ireland Constitutional Convention. Nevertheless, a new constitution should retain Articles and Clauses of the present Irish constitution, if consensus is demonstrated for them. In particular, notice should be taken of Article 15.

The setting up of a special institution to deal with the effects of political violation: (Quote from pamphlet: New Ireland: Sell Out or Opportunity? Revisited)

“To provide an appropriate resource for all people hurt, wounded, bereaved or otherwise hurt by the conflict since 1969. Priority of availability of its facilities should be reserved for young people whose parents or other close relatives were maimed or killed or who, themselves have been otherwise traumatized.”

In our submission to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation (1995) we proposed that such an institution should be located in attractive and extensive surroundings and that it should be an institution to which *everyone*, regardless of their background, could relate.

It is vital that people who were in any way traumatized by our 30 years of violence – whether as violators or as persons violated – should have access to professional counseling in a peaceful atmosphere and in complete confidence. Additionally, if we wish to exorcise the effects of what we have done to each other as a result of generations of conflict, we should take cognizance of what has been done in South Africa in this respect.

Even so, Bishop Tutu insists that it would be naïve to believe that a system of reconciliation that has worked in one part of the world would necessarily be appropriate in the different context of some other part. Nevertheless, we should address the issues involved in the exposure of Truth as a means to healing, reconciliation and closure. The use of Restorative Justice, carefully monitored by legal obligation, may also have a significant role to play in building a new and better society.

Violence and Consequences: need for a healing process; truth and reconciliation in conjunction with Restorative Justice, governed by appropriate legislation

Violent action, when wearing a uniform or when not so dressed, cannot change the definition even though claims to legitimacy on behalf of the state or on behalf of the ‘cause’ may help those who feel eligible to claim it. By resorting to such claim, they may be able to diffuse the patho-psychological consequences in regard to their acts of violation. Even so, ‘legitimacy’ may be an embarrassing justification in a society in which absence of political consensus is compounded by social and political alienation of one form or another.

All people are born equal

We have argued in the New Ireland Group that all people are different, that each is unique, yet all are part of the same humanity. Whether we believe that people derive from God (the beginning) “in the beginning... God...” or whether we simply acknowledge a humanitarian principle that, however different we seem to be, we are all prone to similar feelings of remorse and guilt following an act of violence unless we can successfully sublimate the effect by resorting to falsehood regarding the object of our violation.

Many people who have committed acts of violence will confirm that they have lived to be haunted by what they have done, that they become continuously aware of the “KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK” of conscience to which Alexander Solzhenitsyn refers in *The Gulag Archipelago*.

From that point, descent into insanity and worse or ascent, through a process of redemption become stark alternatives. What is true for the individual is almost certainly true also for the collective on whose behalf the individual may claim to have been acting.

On the other hand, many people live out their lives apparently unaffected by the violence they have done to others. Those of us who watched Robert Kee’s ‘Ireland Series’ may remember, should they have remembered nothing else, the way in which an old man, with no expression of remorse or regret, told how he had put two British soldiers up against the wall on ‘Bloody Sunday’, 1920, and with a salutary, “May the Lord have mercy on your souls”, he had “plugged the pair of them.”

From that statement, made more than 50 years after the act of killing, the question arises as to whether or not we may conclude that violation may be perpetrated without negative patho-psychological consequence.

In response, it seems reasonable to suggest that the old man had not ruminated upon what he had done because he had been able to concoct a feeling, sufficiently false, about the humanity of the two soldiers. He was able to use what he decided that they represented as justification for his action. Nevertheless, to secure such justification, more importantly, to sustain it, he would have felt it necessary to convince those most near and dear to him.

Thus our falsehoods may well provide the pollen that will fertilize the violence of a succeeding generation and oblige it, in turn, to enter the cycle of suffering. In other words, if the violator can live with what s/he has done, those nearest and dearest to him/her are unlikely to escape consequences.

An All-Ireland Constitutional Convention

Were such a convention to realize the objective of achieving a consensus for the construction of a New Ireland, it would then be obliged to draft a provisional constitution that would describe arrangements for which consensus might be reasonably expected and then place these before the public for ratification by preferendum, provided such is by then adequately comprehended, or, failing such comprehension, by weighted majority vote to be cast simultaneously in the North of Ireland and in the Irish Republic.

In the event of failure to have the draft constitution ratified, our proposals for the further management of the process can be found the publication: New Ireland: Sell Out or Opportunity: 30 years on and Revisited.

A Citizens List

The citizen of the New Ireland must feel that he/she has had her/his opinion included in the consideration of its formulation.

Back ground to the New Ireland Group

The New Ireland Group was founded in 1982 to provide an empathetic political space for discussion among people who could not easily identify with any of the political parties. From the start it aimed to discuss ideas that could lead to those born into the Unionist tradition *joining with their neighbours to give leadership, as Ulster men and women, in the building of the New Ireland of the future.*

The three main planks of the Group's projection have been:

- The development of Consensus Democracy
- The pursuit of Individual and Collective Community Development
- Consideration of the means and implications of Redemptive politics

Additionally: opposition to unaccountable centralism, support for the Irish language and culture and, without prejudice, for all the other forms of cultural expression in our increasingly multi-cultural society, on-going comment on current affairs.

A New Ireland should be an ecologically Green Ireland...(sustainability, green energy from wind, water, sun, waste not, want not, unpolluted and litter free, rejecting built-in obsolescence, sharing today, conserving for tomorrow).

Our main objective remains firm: to assist by all democratic means possible, to bring about the de-partitioning of Ireland and to establish a new constitution ratified by the people of Ireland as a whole. Thus we have emphasized that a New Ireland cannot be the Old Ireland in disguise.

Epilogue

Lord Craigavon: formerly, Sir James Craig

Frank Gallagher, author of the book: *The Indivisible Island* (1952) quotes on page 161, a significant comment made by Craigavon who, was on his way to visit Mr. Neville Chamberlain:

At that time (1938) observed the author, Craigavon admitted privately that partition could not last: *“In this island we cannot live always separated from one another. We are too small to be apart or for the border to be there for all time. The change will not come in my time but it will come.”*

Lord Carson

We make no apology for repeating yet again the following words of Sir Edward Carson. At the height of the heated debates in the House of Commons, concerning the mobilization of the illegal Ulster Volunteer Force, Winston Churchill sought to lower the temperature by making a direct appeal to the Ulster Leader (Sir Edward Carson):

“Why cannot the right honourable and learned gentleman say boldly, ‘Give me the amendments in this Home Rule Bill which I ask for, to safeguard the dignity and interests of Protestant Ulster and I in return will use all my influence and goodwill to make Ireland an integral unit in a federal system”

Carson's reply was unexpectedly conciliatory:

"If Home Rule is to pass...much as I detest it and little as I will take the responsibility for passing it, my earnest hope, and indeed I would say, my earnest prayer, would be that the Government of Ireland for the South and West would prove and might prove such as success in the future, notwithstanding all our anticipations, that it might be even for the interests of Ulster itself to move toward that Government and come in under it and form one unit in relation to Ireland."

Even though Carson was thinking of Ireland as part of a federation of Great Britain and Ireland, he had nevertheless shown in that statement that he was not adamantly wedded to partition.

Previously, in an expression of outrage following the murder of two of his 'kinsmen', Carson had gone much further:

"I speak vehemently as an Irishman to English people, and say that if you are not prepared to govern Ireland according to the ordinary elementary conditions of civilization that prevail in every country, then go out of Ireland and leave us to govern ourselves."

Now, around ninety years later, people would not be too sympathetic to Carson's notion of coming 'under' the government of the South and West. In today's world, 'with' or 'into partnership' would seem preferable to 'under'. National imperialism has had its day.