

**“Taking Responsibility”:  
Conflict Transformation and the Loyalist Paramilitaries of  
Northern Ireland**

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April 2011  
Senior Honors Thesis  
International Relations, Tufts University

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to thank the leadership of the Ulster Defense Association, the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Political Research Group, and the Progressive Unionist Party for their generous time and contributions to this work. Their willingness to welcome me into their communities afforded me opportunities to acquire insights that I would otherwise have never been able to gain, and their honesty in explaining a troubled history and a hopeful future was truly enlightening. In addition, thank you to those who offered advice and analysis throughout my travels in Belfast and upon my return home.

I would also like to acknowledge my advisors, Professor Eileen Babbitt for her gracious acceptance of an undergraduate advisee and for her unstinting encouragement and Professor Kelly Greenhill for her astute critiques and for making time in her busy schedule. I would like to give a special thank you to Allan Leonard of the Northern Ireland Foundation for his incredible mentorship, Quintin Oliver of Stratagem for sharing with me his endless networks, and Tony Novosel for his constant enthusiasm and guidance. Although they had no obligation to support my research, they have always made themselves available to discuss, debate, and advise. Most importantly, this research would not have been possible without the financial support of Sherman Teichman and the Tufts Institute for Global Leadership and of the Tufts Undergraduate Research Fund.

Finally, thank you to all those who are “taking responsibility” for conflict transformation and working to build peaceful societies. I hope that this research does justice to your work. You inspire me.

## **ABSTRACT**

Since the Troubles, Northern Ireland's Protestant loyalist paramilitary organizations, the Ulster Defense Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force, have started on a road of fundamental change in pursuit of sustainable peace. Intrinsic to this process has been the theory of conflict transformation, which has become loyalist gospel; however, a means of assessing the extent to which the loyalist paramilitaries are adhering to this creed remains limited. Built on the seminal work of scholar John Paul Lederach and on the loyalists' own doctrine of "sharing responsibility," this research establishes a framework to assess the extent to which the loyalist paramilitaries are engaging in conflict transformation. This study presents a comprehensive analysis of the loyalist initiatives within the tripartite framework of *restructuring relationships*, *building capacity*, and *reconceptualizing norms* for conflict transformation and analyzes each in accordance with three indicators of taking responsibility—*behaving correctly*, *being accountable*, and *acting independently*. This process elucidates not only what the loyalists are doing to in support of conflict transformation, but also the degree of their success.

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## ACRONYMS

CLMC	Combined Loyalist Military Command
CPNI	Community Partnership Northern Ireland
CTI	Conflict Transformation Initiative
DDR	Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EPIC	Ex-Prisoners Interpretive Center
HET	Historical Enquiries Team
IICD	International Independent Commission on Decommissioning
IMC	Independent Monitoring Commission
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
NILP	Northern Ireland Labour Party
NUPRG	New Ulster Political Research Group
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party
RHC	Red Hand Commando
RIRA	Real Irish Republican Army
UDA	Ulster Defense Association
UDP	Ulster Democratic Party
UDU	Ulster Defense Union
UFF	Ulster Freedom Fighters
ULDP	Ulster Loyalist Democratic Party
ULF	Ulster Loyalist Front
UPRG	Ulster Political Research Group
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force
UWC	Ulster Workers' Council
VPP	Volunteer Political Party

*We have the propensity to blame somebody else for what is wrong, and in Northern Ireland that is truer than most. We haven't grasped that responsibility and I advocate that we do that if we want to go forward.*

*-David Ervine, 1998<sup>1</sup>*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Even before his untimely death in January 2007, Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) leader David Ervine was an icon in loyalism. With his great charisma and eloquence, Ervine presided over what is, to date, the most successful period of the PUP. Most importantly, he maintained his East Belfast Assembly seat from 1998 until his death, enabling him to offer a strong and credible voice on behalf of working class loyalism, which had so long been neglected. His personal trajectory from paramilitarism to politics has inspired support within working class Protestant communities in Northern Ireland, and his progressive social and political agenda gained him the respect of leaders from within republicanism and unionism alike.<sup>2</sup> Ervine's personal journey exemplifies David Trimble's statement, which has since become embedded in loyalist lingo: 'just because you have a past doesn't mean you don't have a future.' This concept also lies at the core of the theory of conflict transformation.

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<sup>1</sup> David Ervine. Interview with James McAuley, Belfast, 1998, in David Ervine and James McAuley. "Redefining Loyalism: a political perspective, an academic perspective." Working Papers in British-Irish Studies 4. (2001): 13.

<sup>2</sup> See Henry Sinnerton, *David Ervine: Uncharted Waters* (Dingle: Brandon, 2002).

Throughout and since the end of the Troubles, Northern Ireland's 30-year-long sectarian conflict, the theory and practice of conflict transformation have become gospel to the PUP and to the loyalist paramilitaries, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)—of which Ervine was previously a member—and the Ulster Defense Association (UDA). Conflict transformation theory states that the transition from conflict to peace is a protracted and active process of structural change, whereby institutions and relationships are transformed at all levels from the government to the grassroots in order to facilitate sustainable peace. While scholars typically apply the theory to intergroup conflict—such as the sectarian violence between Irish nationalists and British unionists—the loyalists apply the term more broadly to include the internal transformation necessary to build lasting peace. Therefore, conflict transformation is an essential lens through which to understand the loyalist paramilitaries, their working class communities, and their continuing struggle for self-confidence, stability, and prosperity. Fundamentally, this study asks to what extent the loyalist paramilitaries are engaging in conflict transformation; however, the existing literature offers little guidance as to the mechanisms by which to answer this question. This study proposes a framework for such an assessment. In particular, it introduces 'taking responsibility' as the critical measure of progress, and although the related indicators of 'taking responsibility' do not offer a predictive model, they emphasize how and why the loyalists are engaging in particular conflict transformation activities rather than just identifying the activities themselves. Given that the language of 'responsibility' has a long history in loyalist political thinking, 'taking responsibility' is a ready instrument to assess the extent to which the loyalists are adhering to their gospel of conflict transformation.

In tackling this core research question, I first provide an overview of conflict transformation theory, exploring the significant scholarship and deriving an analytical framework for applying to the case of the loyalists. I then present a historical analysis of loyalism, elucidating the interpolation of violence and politics as parallel methods employed by the loyalists during the Troubles. This attention to loyalist political development as a historical trend demonstrates a precedent for the current involvement in conflict transformation. Lastly, I offer an analysis of loyalist conflict transformation activities, employing the indicators of ‘taking responsibility’ in order to determine the extent to which the UVF and the UDA are succeeding to fulfill their creed of conflict transformation.

Despite the growing trend of recognizing loyalist contributions to politics and to community development, the loyalist paramilitaries are still dramatically underrepresented and underappreciated in the existing literature.<sup>3</sup> Given the persistence of negative media portrayals and vestigial stereotypes from the Troubles, this study serves not as an attempt at absolving the loyalists of their bad behavior, but as an independent and empirical study that strives to offer balanced insight. Therefore, the research draws on scholarship exploring history, psychology, peacebuilding, criminology, and sociology as a means to explain the obstacles to and incentives for social and political change. Moreover, I undertook two research trips to Belfast, first in March 2010, with a focus on the UDA since decommissioning and again in January 2011, with a focus on the UDA and the UVF involvement in conflict transformation. During both trips, I conducted extensive interviews with paramilitary leaders, politicians, community

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the work of Tony Novosel (forthcoming), James McAuley, Peter Shirlow, Jon Tonge, Aaron Edwards, Stephen Bloomer, Graham Spencer



members, scholars, and journalists. I traveled throughout Belfast city to the four main “brigade areas”—North, South, East, and West—gaining both localized and cross-cutting insights from the top paramilitary and political leadership in each organization. This experience in the field, and the opportunity to compare it with secondary source research was formative to an understanding of the loyalist self-perception, of the public’s perception, of the ‘reality,’ and of the tensions among the three. The primary limitation of this fieldwork was the restricted timeframe of each trip, causing me to prioritize my interviews and relinquishing opportunities to gain insights from mid-level commanders and rank-and-file members. The republican perspective is also lacking. Nonetheless, I acquired over thirty hours of interview material with nearly three dozen individuals. The research draws significantly on current news reports and on continued correspondences with representatives in Belfast.

The observations and interactions resulting from this research illuminate a convoluted image of loyalism, which defies old stereotypes, generalizations about the each organization, and even assumptions about individuals’ motives. Although this study attempts to build a consensus for answering the question to what extent are the loyalists engaging in conflict transformation, the micro-level relationships and tight communities in Northern Ireland continue to define the current trajectory of conflict transformation, complicating the consensus and offering outliers and aberrations. Nonetheless, an inclusive assessment of loyalist participation in conflict transformation reveals important trends that offer critical insight into how the loyalists are taking responsibility and beginning to create a platform for future conflict transformation.

## II. CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION: BUILDING AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Conflict transformation scholar John Paul Lederach defines conflict transformation as “a comprehensive set of lenses for describing how conflict emerges from, evolves within, and brings about changes in the personal, relational, structural dimensions, and for developing creative responses that promote peaceful change within those dimensions through non-violent mechanisms.”<sup>4</sup> Conflict transformation scholars seek to differentiate the process from conflict resolution and management, describing it as a holistic process of coping with conflict. They assert that conflict transformation diverges from the traditional “statist approach,” which assumes that conflicting groups function according to defined hierarchies, and rather includes all stakeholders at all levels of the political process.<sup>5</sup> The inclusive process of conflict transformation enables a “paradigmatic shift” toward “a society-wide network of relationships and mechanisms that promote justice and address the root causes of enmity before they can regenerate destabilizing tensions.”<sup>6</sup>

Although the term “conflict transformation” did not emerge until the early 1980s, the concept had long been incubating within the literature on conflict and peace. The work of Johan Galtung represents the foundation of many of these concepts. His differentiation of direct/personal and indirect/structural violence had a decisive impact on

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<sup>4</sup> John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1997): 83.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid: 16.

<sup>6</sup> Richard H. Solomon, “Foreword” in John Paul Lederach. *Building Peace*.

the understanding of the causes of conflict, and his coinciding assessment of negative and positive peace similarly transformed the standards for ending conflict.<sup>7</sup> Rather than striving merely to satisfy the political objectives of ceasefires and negotiated settlements, the concept of positive peace emphasizes that without a fundamental and concurrent shift in the nature of structures and institutions that foster social injustice, oppression, and violence, the conflict will remain unresolved and, in fact, likely to reignite.

Adam Curle's *Making Peace* built directly on Galtung's framework and established the basic building blocks for conflict transformation theory. In his seminal work, Curle delineates "unpeaceful" and "peaceful" relationships and demonstrates the necessity of peacemaking as a dialectical process from the former to the latter. According to Curle, among the most significant mechanisms of peacemaking are *bargaining* and *conciliation*, which he contends are the responsibilities of organizations and individuals respectively. Notably, Curle recognizes that these are distinct, but interrelated processes.<sup>8</sup> Curle also gives particular attention to the role of *education* as a means of empowerment, the catalyst for advocacy, confrontation, and development.<sup>9</sup>

The value of education as the key to mobilization is central to the scholarship of Paulo Freire, most celebrated for his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire's critical contribution is the concept of conscientization, which "represents the development of the awakening of critical awareness."<sup>10</sup> Freire proposes that conscientization is the essential

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<sup>7</sup> Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 170, 183.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Curle, *Making Peace* (London: Tavistock, 1971): 178.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid: 192-194.

<sup>10</sup> Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury, 1973): 19.

process by which the oppressed can pursue liberation, by recognizing their condition and envisioning their freedom, or as Elise Boulding calls it, “imaging” the future.<sup>11</sup> Freire acknowledges, however, that there is often a “fear of freedom” born from the realization that autonomy also demands responsibility.<sup>12</sup> This fear plagues the oppressed and prevents them from engaging in the process of constructing a critical consciousness.

In his essay “the Politics of Recognition,” Charles Taylor asserts that lack of recognition is a form of oppression that inflicts psychological injury. Taylor writes:

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.<sup>13</sup>

This commentary elucidates the importance of interpersonal relationships in determining self-perception. In particular, Diana Francis notes the importance of respect as the converse of lack of recognition, defining it as “the recognition of the true nature and potential of others, the acknowledgement of their reality and needs, the will to make space for them and honor them.”<sup>14</sup> John Burton further acknowledges recognition as a basic human need, which extends beyond the physical necessities of food, water, and shelter, but also contrasts with interests, which are negotiable. Burton suggests that unfulfilled basic human needs are the major sources of conflict, because they often

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<sup>11</sup> Elise Boulding, “Image and Action in Peace Building,” *Journal of Social Issues* 44, no. 2 (1988): 17-37.

<sup>12</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970): 46.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1992): 25.

<sup>14</sup> Diana Francis, *People, Peace, and Power: Conflict Transformation in Action* (London: Pluto Press, 2002): 70.

emanate from underlying structural inefficiencies that prevent such needs from being met.<sup>15</sup>

Edward Azar further develops the theory on the sources of conflict through his explication of the genesis, dynamics, and outcomes of protracted social conflicts. Azar describes the fulfillment of human needs as a combination of acceptance of identity, access to institutions, and security of physical being.<sup>16</sup> Azar contends that if left unaddressed, these needs function as critical nodes on the causal chain of conflict and leave societies susceptible to cycles of violence. While Azar emphasizes these unfulfilled needs as reasons for the inception and escalation of violence, Hugh Miall suggests that Azar's model also functions as a roadmap for the de-escalation of conflict when followed in reverse order.<sup>17</sup>

Louis Kriesberg, in his work on conflict trajectories, outlines the essential processes of de-escalation, which he claims must occur throughout three distinct spheres: internal to each adversary, between adversaries, and among other parties in the broader social environment of conflict.<sup>18</sup> Through these processes, Kriesberg suggests that conflicts can produce constructive outcomes, which he defines as those which are mutually acceptable to the involved parties and especially those which "provide the basis for an ongoing relationship in which future conflicts will tend to be waged

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15<sup>1</sup> John Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990): 40.

16<sup>1</sup> Edward Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1990): 9.

17<sup>1</sup> Hugh Miall, "Conflict Transformation: A Multi-Dimensional Task" in *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation* (August 2004): 6.

18<sup>1</sup> Louis Kriesberg, *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998): 182.

constructively.”<sup>19</sup> Kriesberg proposes a problem-solving approach as the most effective mechanism for achieving constructive outcomes. He defines this approach as an exchange of information in order to solve a shared problem.

According to John Prendergast and Emily Plumb, in practice, conflict transformation demands the active development of support at the grassroots and civil society levels to ensure local implementation of national political peace processes.<sup>20</sup> This public endorsement is one node in what Kriesberg calls peace constituencies, which include a network of social and political actors who facilitate trust-building and broad buy-in for a society-wide transformation.<sup>21</sup> Most importantly, engagement with civil society can best address the grievances of those most affected by conflict and most often excluded from the “peace dividends.” Elham Atashi suggests that conflict transformation offers strategies to deal with the impaired socio-economic status, security, and reconciliation that tend to plague communities most susceptible to violence and most apt to produce spoilers of peace.<sup>22</sup> These strategies demand flexible and sustained efforts to sufficiently respond to and transform the entrenched and protracted roots of the conflict.

John Paul Lederach’s model of conflict transformation is significant for its integration of this vast literature and for its ability to frame conflict as a natural condition not to eliminate, but to ‘transform.’ According to Lederach, conflict is integral to human

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid: 22.

<sup>20</sup> John Prendergast and Emily Plumb, “Building Local Capacity: From Implementation to Peacebuilding,” in Stephen John Stedman, Donald Rothchild, Elizabeth Cousens, eds., *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002): 327.

<sup>21</sup> Kriesberg: 115.

<sup>22</sup> Elham Atashi, “Challenges to Conflict Transformation from the Streets,” in Bruce Dayton and Louis Kriesberg, eds. *Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding: Moving from Violence to Sustainable Peace* (New York: Routledge, 2009): 50.

relationships; however, its manifestation can be either violent or nonviolent.<sup>23</sup> His model is predicated on the notion that protracted social conflict occur in societies where identities, cohesion, and spatial proximities are narrow, resulting in shared, yet divergent histories and bitter stereotypes.<sup>24</sup> These conditions generate embittered, but reciprocal relationships that are as “intractable” as the violent conflict they produce.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, Lederach claims that relationships are the basis of conflict and must be the central focus in developing a sustainable solution.<sup>26</sup> In the context of conflict transformation, the range of relationships extends beyond the formal interactions between political elites to include the network of relationships among middle-range sectoral leaders and local grassroots leaders.<sup>27</sup> Conflict transformation offers the tools to restructure these relationships, such that “the nature of the relationship and conflict is *transformed* from one expressed through violence and arms to one expressed through non-violent means.”<sup>28</sup> This process makes relationships more resilient to violent conflict by building interdependence and enables actors to engage in constructive outlets for discord that mitigate future violence.

Although restructuring relationships is perhaps the most vital element of conflict transformation, this process requires a concurrent shift in the structural context in which relationships are inextricably embedded. Lederach’s integrated framework for

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<sup>23</sup> Lederach: 27.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid: 13.

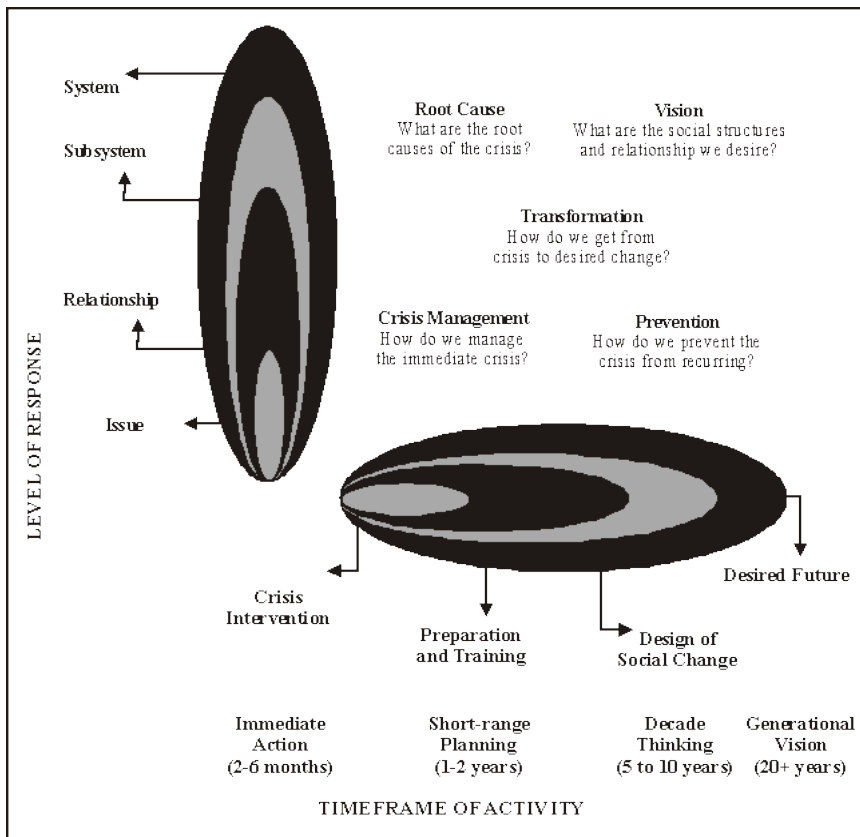
<sup>25</sup> Ibid: 14.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid: 26.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid: 38.

<sup>28</sup> Kumar Rupesinghe, *Civil Wars, Civil Peace: An Introduction to Conflict Resolution* (London: Pluto Press, 1998): 3.

peacebuilding incorporates these requisite transformations. The framework is built on Maire Dugan’s “nested theory of conflict,” which disaggregates conflict into four interrelated levels for intervention: the immediate issue, the conflictual relationship, the specific context of the subsystems, and societal norms of the system, in order of their perceived immediacy to the crisis.<sup>29</sup> Each level requires a correlated response: crisis intervention, preparation and training, design of social change, and desired future, respectively and in order of their immediacy in terms of time frame.<sup>30</sup>



Source: John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), p. 80.

<sup>29</sup> Lederach: 57.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid: 76-77.



Lederach combines these levels and processes in a matrix and identifies five “distinct—and all too often discrete—communities of thought and action in the broader field of peacebuilding,”<sup>31</sup> namely 1) root causes for addressing the underlying systemic structures; 2) crisis management for diminishing immediate physical violence; 3) prevention for undermining precipitating factors of recurring violence; 4) vision for building a generational perspective; and 5) transformation for shifting from the immediate issues and levels of response to the long-term.<sup>32</sup> Lederach suggests that conflict transformation “holds special potential,” given its placement at the mid-point, which enables it to draw on and anticipate all four dimensions of conflict termination.<sup>33</sup> Without both short-term security and a long-term end goal, conflict termination will remain limited in their impact. Without a recognition of both the systemic causes and the issue-level triggers, conflict termination risks addressing only the superficial causes while failing to eliminate the underlying incentives for violence. Conflict transformation therefore acknowledges both the short- and long-term throughout all four levels.

Lederach further defines conflict transformation in terms of four interdependent dimensions. The personal dimension implies “emotional, perceptual, and spiritual” changes internal to the individual.<sup>34</sup> The relational dimension suggests changes between two individuals, especially in terms of the nature of their interactions and communications. The structural dimension acknowledges changes to systems that perpetuate underlying grievances. Finally, the cultural dimension refers to changes that

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid: 79.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid: 79-81.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid: 81.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid: 82.

occur in broad societal norms and narratives regarding conflict.<sup>35</sup> Such a holistic conflict transformation approach draws on the full spectrum of actors and structures, which are critical resources for rather than recipients of change. Although Lederach suggests that “it will take as long to get out of an armed conflict as it took to get in,” conflict transformation has the potential to yield sustainable peace.<sup>36</sup>

In the context of the loyalist paramilitaries of Northern Ireland, I adopt a framework of *restructuring relationships*, *building capacity*, and *reconceptualizing norms*, which coincide with the relational, structural, and cultural dimensions of conflict transformation. For the purposes of this study—which explores the UDA and the UVF as organizations, rather than their individual members—I disregard Lederach’s personal dimension. Instead, I focus on the three dimensions involving themes of collective identities and organizational cultures. The resultant tripartite framework describes the processes by which the changes occur in each the dimensions.

1. *Restructuring relationships* involves a concerted effort by all individuals or groups party to a relationship to alter the existing nature of interactions and communications. As described by Curle, this process seeks to reform unpeaceful relationships defined by violence or repression and to build peaceful relationships defined by tolerance and equality. Although former grievances and contested issues may persist, restructuring relationships enables alternatives that ultimately empower each party to fulfill its own goals and interests without necessarily damaging those of other parties. As Kriesberg describes, restructuring relationships facilitates the de-escalation of conflict only when undertaken both between adversaries *and* within each adversary. With respect

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid: 83.

<sup>36</sup> Lederach: 78.

to organizations rather than individuals, restructuring relationships requires an internal process to overhaul the inherent organizational structures that facilitate violent or repressive means of interacting. Reestablishing these internal structures for peaceful purposes can in itself substantively alter the nature of external relationships. As discussed by Prendergast and Plumb, restructuring relationships is essential to consolidate the peace process by linking the political process to the grassroots and, according to Kriesberg, to embedding it in peace constituencies and society at large.

2. *Building capacity* necessitates a comprehensive restoration, reform, or even wholesale redevelopment of institutions and state or municipal practices. This process strives to address what Galtung describes as structural violence, the underlying causes of conflict embedded in state infrastructure. Therefore, building capacity demands changes to infrastructure at all levels and through all systems—administrative, financial, social, etc.—to make society more capable of meeting the need of individuals and communities. Kriesberg suggests that that a problem-solving approach that includes the active exchange of information is the most fundamental means of generating such change. As Atashi describes, building capacity essentially alters the concrete incentive structures that empower spoilers of peace, and both Freire and Curle note the particular importance of educational systems as a mechanism for building human capacity. Therefore, state and local leaders must assess the shortcomings of relevant infrastructure and actors and develop targeting instruments to build new systems, knowledge, and skills.

3. *Reconceptualizing norms* entails the clear articulation of new societal narratives, standards, and values that replace old cultural assumptions and behaviors. These broad overarching conceptions are often difficult to target and even more difficult

to eradicate given their connection to deeply embedded psychological values of identity, ethics, and human needs, which, as defined by Azar, are often the sources of conflict. Recognition, as described by Taylor and Burton, and respect, as defined by Francis, are two of the most important of these human needs. Instructing the reconceptualization of norms requires a decisive expression of visions for a desired future, as discussed by Boulding in her work on “imaging” the future. Such visualization must occur not only among elite leaders, but also within broader society, which must undergo a process of what Freire calls conscientization to construct critical awareness. Ultimately, reconceptualizing norms has the potential to combat violent narratives and encourage new narratives of peace and tolerance.

These three interrelated processes offer an analytical framework for understanding conflict transformation, but lack a clear measure to gauge progress. To address this limitation, I propose the metric of ‘taking responsibility.’ The Oxford English dictionary describes “responsibility” as, among other definitions: “a moral obligation **to behave correctly** toward or in respect of;” “the state or fact **of being accountable** or to blame for something;” and “the opportunity or ability **to act independently** and make decisions without authorization” [emphasis added].<sup>37</sup> These three denotations of “responsibility” are undoubtedly intertwined, but when operationalized, provide a clear tool for the assessment of conflict transformation. In the context of the Northern Ireland loyalist paramilitaries, these three indicators of ‘taking responsibility’ are defined as follows.

1. *Behaving correctly* is an active commitment to ethical behavior as delineated by written law, the provisions of the peace process, and societal standards. Most

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<sup>37</sup> “Responsibility.” Oxford English Dictionary Online. 2011.  
[http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m\\_en\\_us1284545#m\\_en\\_us1284545](http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_us1284545#m_en_us1284545).

fundamentally, lawful conduct demands the cessation of violent and criminal activities, regardless of the motives behind them. In particular, the loyalists have cited the defense of their communities as a justification for their behavior; however, the provisions of the peace process, as outlined by the Good Friday Agreement and its surrounding documents, make violent behavior especially indefensible. Given the shift to peacetime conditions in Northern Ireland, the loyalist paramilitaries and evidence of their violent functions in their communities no longer have a place in society and must be suspended. Although they have made statements signifying intentions to change, only the fulfillment of these promises indicates behaving correctly. Moreover, society expects that the loyalist paramilitaries will undertake the requisite changes in a way that is sincere and respectful.

2. *Being accountable* means admitting ownership of actions and behaviors both positive and negative in nature. In response to positive behavior, admitting ownership implies that the loyalist paramilitaries accept credit for their contributions. In response to negative behavior, admitting ownership requires that they accept of blame for wrongdoing. In both cases, being accountable demands of the loyalists a willingness to be transparent in their decision making and current functions. One of the strongest examples building internal accountability is through the establishment of a set of internal checks and balances, which ensure that information is properly disseminated and that decision making powers are not consolidated in the hands of a few leaders. Such internal systems undermine attempts at lying, cheating, and making excuses and empower honest explanations. Given the stated role of the loyalist paramilitaries as defenders of their communities, the loyalists are not only accountable to themselves, but also to their ‘constituents.’ Therefore, being accountable requires that the loyalists exhibit a concerted effort at addressing local needs and interests.

3. *Acting independently* requires, most notably, the conditions of autonomy and expeditiousness. Although the loyalist paramilitaries may endeavor to undertake ethical behavior, such steps are not evidence of acting independently unless they are pursued in a way that is intrinsically rewarding for their constructive societal contributions. Rather, demands for rewards or responses to inducements or coercion by politicians and officials represent a failure of true autonomy. With respect to expeditiousness, even the eventual fulfillment of plans for ethical behavior fail to meet the indicator of acting independently if it has suffered from persistent delay due to internal decision making and politicking. Rather, acting independently requires the rapid response of the loyalists to the needs and interests of their communities.

Over the past decade, the theory and practice of conflict transformation and the language of ‘taking responsibility’ have both found fertile ground in the loyalist community in Northern Ireland. In coincidence with the Good Friday Agreement, PUP strategist Billy Mitchell began to apply Lederach’s ideas of conflict transformation to the goals and objectives of the PUP, with David Ervine at the helm.<sup>38</sup> Ervine’s commitment to conflict transformation extended beyond his role as a spokesperson and into an active experience of conflict transformation through the process of restructuring his own relationships, building his capacity as a leader, and reconceptualizing his norms in order to create a distinctive vision for the future, which is still embraced by the loyalist community. This engagement with—and resultant empowerment through—conflict transformation has made Ervine into something of a legend throughout the loyalist community and Northern Ireland. Although the loyalist paramilitaries more broadly have

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<sup>38</sup> Aaron Edwards, “The Progressive Unionist Party of Northern Ireland: A Left-Wing Voice in an Ethnically-Divided Society,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 12, no. 4 (2010): 605.

not yet mobilized a successful campaign for conflict transformation, the theory and practice have critical potential far beyond Ervine.

The language of responsibility derives from loyalist political thinking expressed in the PUP’s 1985 discussion paper, “Sharing Responsibility.” Principally, this document proposed that the end of the Troubles required not only the sharing of power, but also the sharing of responsibility as the necessary “form of government.”<sup>39</sup> Although the document fails to clearly define the loyalist conception of responsibility, it indicates that responsibility is an essential element in the process towards peace. Despite the formal end of the Troubles and the subsequent establishment of a power-sharing government, Northern Ireland remains plagued by social and political finger-pointing that assigns blame instead of taking responsibility.

	Taking Responsibility			
		Behaving Correctly	Being Accountable	Acting Independently
Conflict Transformation	Restructuring Relationships			
	Building Capacity			
	Reconcept. Norms			

In this context, this study employs the metrics of conflict transformation and of ‘taking responsibility’ as means to assess the extent to which the loyalists are adhering to their own standards. Together, the three processes of conflict transformation and the three indicators of taking responsibility define a matrix, which guides the following

<sup>39</sup> PUP. “Election ’07: ‘A New Dawn.’” (Belfast: PUP, 2007): 3.

analysis. Although this matrix does not establish a predictive model, it elucidates the specific strengths and weaknesses in the loyalists' conflict transformation activities and the reasons for their progress or delay. This systematic assessment of taking responsibility is the critical contribution of this study for its introduction of specific measurements of conflict transformation and, most importantly, for its application of the loyalists' own gospel. While Lederach's conflict transformation theory generated a renewed interest in the historical loyalist political thinking—such as that outlined in the PUP's "Sharing Responsibility"—this study returns to the language of 'taking responsibility' in an attempt to hold the loyalist paramilitaries to their own standards of working towards peace in Northern Ireland.

### **III. PARAMILITARISM AND POLITICS: A HISTORY OF LOYALISM**

Over a decade since the Good Friday Agreement, the loyalist paramilitaries continue to suffer from harsh stereotypes perpetrated by mainstream politics, the media, and even their own communities. The respective histories of the UVF and UDA have construed the loyalist paramilitaries as highly sectarian forces, parasitic criminals, and brutal vigilantes. The loyalist paramilitaries are, as Sarah Nelson calls them, "Ulster's Uncertain Defenders"—without a unifying ideology, a collective purpose, or a clear outlet during either war or peace.<sup>40</sup> Despite the truth in these stereotypes, overemphasis threatens to obscure important instances of introspection and political action in the history of the loyalist paramilitaries. A brief, but incisive historical exploration can help

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<sup>40</sup> Sarah Nelson, *Ulster's Uncertain Defenders* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1984): 12-16.



highlight these marginalized features of the UVF and the UDA and build a platform for understanding loyalist conflict transformation today.

### *Understanding the Origins*

The history of the loyalist paramilitaries—and of the UVF in particular—is punctuated with episodes of manipulation by the political establishment and with attempts at grassroots progressive politics. The original UVF emerged out of Sir Edward Carson’s campaign against the Home Rule Bill of 1912 for devolved government in Ireland.<sup>41</sup> Although this event sowed the seeds of loyalist paramilitarism, it also represents a defining moment of solidarity within Unionism in Northern Ireland—a feature that would be short lived over the course of the next century.<sup>42</sup>

By 1913, the UVF became a formal militia, mostly drawn from the working class; however, the *raison d’être* of the UVF shifted with the onset of World War I, as many of its members were reconstituted as the British Army 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster Division. On July 1, 1916, the Battle of the Somme decimated the ranks of the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster Division. The event is the embodiment of “blood sacrifice,” resistance and martyrdom on behalf of Britain.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, the Battle of the Somme also marks a uniquely loyalist contribution, delinked from middle class Unionism and mainstream sectarian politics within Northern Ireland.<sup>44</sup> The Battle of the Somme distinguished the UVF as the “people’s army” and

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41<sup>1</sup> Alvin Jackson, “Unionist Myths 1912-1985,” *Past & Present* 136 (Aug 1992): 166.

42<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*: 165.

43<sup>1</sup> Brian Graham, “The Past in the Present: The Shaping of Identity in Loyalist Ulster,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 3 (autumn 2004): 495.

44<sup>1</sup> Brian Graham and Peter Shirlow, “The Battle of the Somme in Ulster Memory and Identity,” *Political Geography* 21 (2002): 891.

became the lynchpin in loyalist mythology, pride, and identity. This narrative of community defense continues to resonate as an element of loyalist self-concept.

Back in Belfast, a series of seminal events came to define the Protestant working class. Despite the success of heavy industry in Belfast, the working class was plagued by persistent problems of unemployment and low wages, which fueled growing radicalism, trade unionism, and class consciousness within both the Catholic and Protestant communities. In 1918, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the establishment of Northern Irish Unionism, formed the Ulster Unionist Labor Association to link Protestant workers to the Unionists in order to stem the tide of trade unionism; however, the organization offered little political will for mitigating unemployment, instead serving the broader Unionist agenda.<sup>45</sup> The failure to integrate working class unionists into “an increasingly centralized strategy of political resistance” precipitated a fragile inclination towards class mobilization across the Protestant-Catholic divide, as evidenced by the 1919 General Strike.<sup>46</sup> The UUP sought to dismantle this class consciousness by fueling religious and political differences, and expelled from the shipyards both Catholics and “rotten Prods” whose views the authorities perceived as threatening to the Unionist establishment.<sup>47</sup> The Unionists also sought to foment sectarianism to prevent cooperation between Protestant and Catholic workers. In particular, they exploited the recent partition and recruited remnants of the UVF into the Ulster Special Constabulary, a state paramilitary force that

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45' Colin Reid, “Protestant Challenges to the ‘Protestant State:’ Ulster Unionism and Independent Unionism in Northern Ireland, 1921-1939,” *Twentieth Century British History* 19, no. 4 (2008): 427.

46' Gareth Jenkins, “Nationalism and Sectarian Violence in Liverpool and Belfast, 1880s-1920s,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 78, no. 1 (2010): 174.

47' J.P. Lynch, *An Unlikely Success Story: The Belfast Shipbuilding Industry 1880-1935* (Belfast: Belfast Society, 2001): 57. See also Austen Morgan, *Labour and Partition: The Belfast Working Class 1905-23* (London: Pluto Press, 1991).

perpetrated UUP violence, including “The Belfast Pogrom” against Catholics in 1920-1922.<sup>48</sup>

Social unrest in the industrialized quarters of Belfast paralleled a growing political awareness and electoral threat to the UUP hold on the Northern Irish parliament at Stormont. In 1920, voters elected twelve Labour candidates to Council, and throughout the decade, the opposition Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) and Independent Unionist candidates maintained several seats.<sup>49</sup> This perceived assault from the working class provoked UUP attempts at vote management, most notably by abolishing proportional representation for the national parliament in 1929.<sup>50</sup> In 1932, the Outdoor Relief Riots revived working class unity as unemployed Protestants and Catholics demanded increased social assistance.<sup>51</sup> The UUP responded by spewing anti-socialist rhetoric and inciting fundamentalist sectarian organizations such as the Ulster Protestant League to attack Catholics throughout 1935.<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless, such overt and institutionalized “discrimination against the northern nationalist minority was encouraged more by a need to control and dampen dissident elements within the Protestant bloc.”<sup>53</sup>

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48: Ronald Munck, “Class Conflict and Sectarianism in Belfast: From Its Origins to the 1930s,” *Contemporary Crises* 9 (1985): 156-157.

49: Munck, “Class and Religion in Belfast—A Historical Perspective,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, no. 2 (Apr 1985): 247; Reid: 420.

50: Michael Farrell, *Arming the Protestants: The Formation of the Ulster Special Constabulary and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, 1920-7* (London: Pluto Press, 1983): 242.

51: Paddy Devlin, *Yes We Have No Bananas: Outdoor Relief in Belfast 1920-1939* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1981): 128-129.

52: Graham Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party: Protest, Pragmatism, and Pessimism* (New York: Manchester University, 2004): 72; and A.C. Hepburn, “The Belfast Riots of 1935,” *Social History* 15, no. 1 (Jan 1990): 76.

53: Reid: 425.

Such classist and sectarian tactics successfully buoyed the UUP's hold on Northern Ireland for the next three decades.

By the 1960s, deindustrialization was causing traditional industries to close their doors and was exacerbating unemployment, which particularly damaged the Protestant working class given that many Catholics had taken advantage of the educational opportunities made available through post-World War Two reforms.<sup>54</sup> These shifts coincided with the Catholic civil rights movement and provoked increasing sectarian tensions. Concurrently, a more aggressive and violent brand of politics was emerging under the leadership of Evangelical Reverend Dr. Ian Paisley. During the early 1960s, Paisley helped found the Ulster Constitution Defense Committee, which maintained a private militia in its Ulster Protestant Volunteers paramilitary group.<sup>55</sup>

In this context, the opposition unionist politicians reestablished the UVF in 1965 as a clandestine military force raised from the Protestant working class to defend the Union. The opposition unionists sought to create a line of defense against not only the IRA terrorists, but also the Unionist establishment, which the opposition perceived as taking an increasingly conciliatory stance toward the government of the Irish Republic.<sup>56</sup> Although the modern manifestation of the UVF has no direct links to the original organization, the mythology established by the initial group continues to define the trajectory of the current organization. The new UVF modeled itself on the British Army, a federal hierarchical organization under the leadership of the so-called Brigade Staff and

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<sup>54</sup> For more on the conditions in Protestant West Belfast, see Ron Wiener, *The Rape and Plunder of the Shankill in Belfast: People and Planning* (Belfast: Nothems Press, 196).

<sup>55</sup> Steve Bruce, *Paisley: Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland* (New York: Oxford, 2007): 81-82.

<sup>56</sup> Roy Garland, *Gusty Spence* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2001): 53.

committed to exclusively military goals. Although the UVF presented itself as a defensive organization, its founding policy asserted that “attack is the best means of defence.”<sup>57</sup> In May 1966, four UVF members, including one of its earliest recruits, Gusty Spence, allegedly murdered three Catholics, leading to a life sentence.<sup>58</sup> A month later, Stormont declared the UVF illegal due to its physical and political threat. This proscription had the effect of intensifying the already highly secretive nature of the UVF. Its members—mostly men in their 20s and 30s—were restricted to only a few hundred who would abide by the organization’s strict discipline.<sup>59</sup>

As the Troubles gained momentum, many in the Protestant working class began to doubt the capacity of the UVF to curtail the rise of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). During 1970, men began organizing as local vigilante groups to protect against cross-community riots. In 1971, the groups came under the umbrella of the UDA, which began to develop a military hierarchy with a central Inner Council and six semi-autonomous brigades.<sup>60</sup> Despite the semblance of a unified organization, each unit retained its localized loyalties and decision-making powers. Such fragmentation fostered parochialism and undermined accountability within the organization, but simultaneously contributed to local community support. By 1972, the UDA grew to the cumbersome size

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57: “UVF Policy” in Graham Spencer, *The State of Loyalism in Northern Ireland* (New York, Palgrave, 2008): 62.

58: Despite his conviction, Spence has always protested his innocence. Recent evidence—a letter sent only months after Spence’s trial raising concerns regarding his guilty verdict—may substantiate Spence’s claims. Such a conclusion would uphold the widespread notion that Spence’s incarceration was politically motivated rather than a veritable criminal charge. See Brian Rowan, “‘New information’ may clear Gusty Spence of 1966 gun killing,” *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 January 2011.

59: Graham Spencer, *The State of Loyalism in Northern Ireland* (New York, Palgrave, 2008): 62-64.

60: Colin Crawford, *Inside the UDA: Volunteers and Violence* (London: Pluto Press, 2003): 25-26.

of nearly 40,000 members, including many younger men whom the UVF had refused.<sup>61</sup> The size and structures of the UDA often yielded a particular propensity for violent sectarianism and a vulnerability to official manipulation and infiltration within the organization that the furtive UVF was more apt to elude. The UDA was plagued with a criminality at all levels, divisive power struggles, and coercive intimidation tactics by the autocratic leadership, all of which inhibited a cohesive military or political strategy. Nonetheless, the UDA's engagement in a range of social programs helped ingratiate the organization with its local communities and also serves to explain the tacit acceptance by the British government, which did not proscribe the UDA until 1992.<sup>62</sup>

By the 1970s, Northern Irish Protestantism included a broad spectrum of paramilitary and political factions. While the UVF committed to upholding the Union with Britain through physical force, the UDA gave its ultimate allegiance to Ulster, advocating an independent state. While the Unionist party continued to represent the old order, the loyalist politicians represented a strong new voice of fierce loyalty to Britain. The most significant figure in loyalist politics remained the firebrand Paisley, who by 1971 had rallied enough support to establish his DUP party.<sup>63</sup> Through his continued campaign of polarization expressed in apocalyptic imagery, evangelical threats, and murderous rhetoric, Paisley offered critical opposition to the UUP and claimed to be the voice of the working class; however, the relationship of the DUP and the loyalist paramilitaries remained troubled. Despite his close affiliations with paramilitary leaders

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61 "Ulster Defense Association." Conflict Archive on the Internet [CAIN]. University of Ulster. 27 April 2010. [cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/uorgan.htm#uda](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/uorgan.htm#uda). 30 April 2010.

62 Spencer: 65.

63 Bruce, *The Edge of the Union: The Ulster Loyalist Political Vision* (New York: Oxford University, 1994): 20.

during his bouts of civil disobedience, Paisley has always denied a direct knowledge of their crimes.<sup>64</sup> He also refuses to acknowledge his responsibility in inciting violence and has consistently disassociated himself from the “Third Force” paramilitaries that emerged under his direction. Nonetheless, there is a persistent discourse “from many young working class men who had joined paramilitaries that they had done so because they believed they were acting in direct response to the suggestions and demands of unionist politicians,” most notably Paisley.<sup>65</sup>

Such denial on the part of Paisley and the DUP fostered a sense of exclusion and betrayal within the loyalist paramilitaries and amplified the “siege mentality” of working class Protestant communities.<sup>66</sup> The identity of many loyalists has therefore become inextricably tied to a sense of societal neglect, but also of “unwavering communal devotion,” embedding a duality of victim and defender.<sup>67</sup> Since the 1980s, the UVF and its loyalist working communities have appropriated the iconography of the Battle of the Somme—silhouettes of soldiers, the “For God and Ulster” motto, and the symbol of remembrance—in an attempt to establish a cohesive loyalist history, culture, and identity. Such imagery continues to evoke pride in resistance and sacrifice, but also serves to legitimize the organization and its violent activities.<sup>68</sup> In contrast, the UDA has tended to identify with the Ulster-Scots movement, but the organization lacks a distinctive cultural

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64 Bruce, *Paisley*: 217.

65 McAuley, James W., Jonathan Tonge, Peter Shirlow, “Conflict, Transformation, and Former Loyalist Paramilitary Prisoners in Northern Ireland,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 1 (2010): 27.

66 Andrew Finlay, “Defeatism and Northern Protestant ‘Identity,’” *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1, no. 2 (December 2001): 4.

67 Graham: 488.

68 Graham and Shirlow: 891.

heritage. As Ian Wood notes, the crime of the loyalist paramilitaries was a “crime of loyalty”—despite a dogged allegiance to Ulster and to their communities, they have received little acknowledgement for their commitment and contributions.<sup>69</sup>

The divide between political and paramilitary loyalists became increasingly exacerbated with the 1974 Ulster Workers’ Council (UWC) strike that toppled the tenuous power-sharing government and the cross-border Council of Ireland born out of the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement. The strike council convened the combined UVF-UDA Ulster Army Council and the UWC representatives of the loyalist working class and was chaired by former UDA commander and loyalist politician Glen Barr.<sup>70</sup> The strike also gained the cautious support of Paisley and the Ulster Vanguard leader William Craig, which gave it a degree of public credibility.<sup>71</sup> Despite the unified facade, “neither Craig nor Paisley took the threat of industrial action seriously,” believing that the strike would be insufficient to alter the political situation. Meanwhile, the paramilitaries feared that the politicians were using them to do their dirty work.<sup>72</sup> In fact, Paisley had arranged to travel abroad for the early days of the strike, and many of the paramilitaries believed it was a tactic to observe the strike from afar, and take credit for the initiative upon its success or remain guiltless upon its failure.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ian Wood, *Crimes of Loyalty: A History of the UDA* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006): vi.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Fisk, *The Point of No Return: The Strike Which Broke the British in Ulster* (London: André Deutsch, 1975): 44.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Taylor, *Loyalists: War and Peace in Northern Ireland* (New York: TV Books, 1999): 128.

<sup>72</sup> Henry Patterson and Eric Kaufman, *Unionism and Orangeism in Northern Ireland Since 1945: The Decline of the Loyal Family* (New York: Manchester University, 2007): 167.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Taylor: 134.



In fourteen days the UWC strike was in fact a success: the paramilitaries barricaded roads, disrupted electricity supplies, and held the political process hostage until the Sunningdale government was suspended.<sup>74</sup> The success is largely attributed to widespread paramilitary intimidation, but the movement also gained the support of workers and provoked little backlash as the UDA ensured that the community maintained access to basic goods.<sup>75</sup> Such decisive action reconstituted the working class as “puppets no more,” winning them significant credibility within their communities and demonstrating their potential for political action exclusive of the loyalist politicians.<sup>76</sup> The paramilitaries contemplated political outcomes, but a dearth of internal political leadership and continuing British propaganda to prevent a cohesive UVF-UDA political body led to a failure to capitalize on the success of the strike.<sup>77</sup> Although the loyalist paramilitaries and their working class communities continued to defer to the politicians who had snubbed them, an internal political awareness had been awakened.

For the UVF, such political awareness was inextricably tied to “Spence University” at Long Kesh prison, which held paramilitary prisoners throughout the Troubles. With the inception of loyalist internment in early 1973 and the rise in UVF prisoners, Gusto Spence began a mission of introspection, civic education, and empowerment.<sup>78</sup> Although the UVF inmates maintained a strict military regimen during

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<sup>74</sup> For a full account see Don Anderson, *14 May Days: The Inside Story of the Loyalist Strike of 1974* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994).

<sup>75</sup> Peter Taylor: 133-134.

<sup>76</sup> Graham and Shirlow: 886.

<sup>77</sup> Bruce, *The Red Hand*: 99-102.

<sup>78</sup> Ed Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two Men's War in Ireland* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010): 358-371.

their imprisonment,<sup>79</sup> Spence University simultaneously offered skills training and provoked progressive debate and open dialogue within the loyalist community, and increasingly on a cross-community basis. Spence sought to build “a coherent analysis of the class structure of traditional unionism” to challenge “the old Stormont system of privilege and patronage.”<sup>80</sup> In conjunction with the UWC strike and persistent tension with elected loyalist politicians, a critical skepticism towards mainstream politics and towards the Unionist authorities, their rhetoric, and their manipulation began to develop. Spence’s cross-community project of the “Camp Councils” is perhaps most impressive. These community forums encouraged loyalist and republican discourse on common issues such as prison conditions, but also evolved into opportunities to discuss political ideology, grievances, and expectations.<sup>81</sup> The success of the Camp Councils provoked the intervention of prison authorities to undermine such cooperative education and exchange.<sup>82</sup>

Even without the obstruction posed by prison officials and establishment politicians, the Camp Council scheme lacked the support of loyalist and republican working class communities caught in the crossfire of the conflict and impeded the transmission of the ideas into practice. The UVF political machine outside of Long Kesh was limitedly successful in 1973 with the election of Hugh Smyth as the councillor for Upper Shankill; however, the feeble Ulster Loyalist Front (ULF) party under which he

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79) UVF, “Standing Orders, Comp. 21,” <http://www.tnovosel.org>.

80) James McAuley, “The Emergence of New Loyalism” in John Coakley ed., *Changing Shades of Orange and Green: Redefining the Union and the Nation* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2002): 107.

81) Garland: 194.

82) Red Hand Commando Student, “The Long Kesh University,” *Combat* 1, no. 22 (1974).

ran quickly folded.<sup>83</sup> In May 1974, the British Northern Ireland Office legalized the UVF and the PIRA in an attempt to encourage the nascent political activism of the paramilitaries.<sup>84</sup> Following on the coattails of the NILP and the transient ULF, Ken Gibson, a graduate of Spence University and one of the leaders of the UWC strike, founded the Volunteer Political Party (VPP) as the political wing of the UVF in opposition to the Unionist establishment.<sup>85</sup> The party espoused democratic socialist values, welfare politics, and prisoners' rights, which the Unionists believed substantiated their attacks on the VPP as a godless, communist organization.<sup>86</sup> The failure of the VPP at the October 1974 Westminster elections marked the end of the political initiative.

In response to the loyalist electoral humiliation, the UVF underwent an internal coup overthrowing the leadership that had legitimized the political initiatives of Spence and his followers. In its place, the UVF installed a ruthless sectarian force in October 1974.<sup>87</sup> The organization descended into a period of deadly violence devoid of political purpose. By 1975, the Shankill Butchers, a brutal sectarian gang, and other rogue UVF units such as the Mid-Ulster Brigade perpetrated some of the most savage crimes of the Troubles, tarnishing the image of the UVF.<sup>88</sup> The Northern Ireland Office rebranded the UVF an illegal organization in October 1975.<sup>89</sup> As their working class loyalist

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83 Bruce, *The Red Hand*: 119.

84 Peter Taylor: 127.

85 Ken Gibson and Billy Davison, "Volunteer Political Party Statement," *Combat* 1, no. 14 (1974).

86 Ross Frenett, "'Protestant Socialists'? Ulster Loyalism and Working-Class Politics: 1969-1974," *Scrinium*, University College Cork (2010): 34.

87 Moloney: 361; Bruce, *The Red Hand*: 130.

88 See Martin Dillon, *The Shankill Butchers: The Real Story of Cold-Blooded Mass Murder* (New York: Routledge, 1989) for a comprehensive exploration of the activities of the group.

89 Jim Cusack and Henry McDonald, *UVF* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1997): 165.

communities began turning against them, the UVF launched a counter-coup in October 1975 to reorient its leadership.<sup>90</sup> By November the organization was stabilizing with the ascendancy of John ‘Bunter’ Graham as the chief brigadier.<sup>91</sup>

The UVF’s political agenda resumed with the emergence of the PUP in 1977. The ideology of the PUP resided in the policy document “Sharing Responsibility,” an early draft of which was produced under the auspices of Spence University beginning in 1972, subsequently adopted by the PUP upon its formation, and published and reissued several times since. This document espouses values of ‘civic unionism’<sup>92</sup> in opposition to the “religio-ethnic unionism” of the Unionists and the DUP.<sup>93</sup> In its 1985 iteration, “Sharing Responsibility” proposes a political solution to the Troubles that echoes much of what was eventually embodied in the Good Friday Agreement: a devolved power-sharing government, a Bill of Rights, and North-South cooperation as well as Anglo-Irish cooperation.<sup>94</sup> Within this framework, the PUP advocated strong local representation, especially on behalf of working class communities. Despite the traditional associations of unionism with Protestantism, the PUP defined a “Unionist” as “a person who irrespective of political or religious persuasion believes that the economic link with the United Kingdom is more viable and beneficial than any other system yet proposed.”<sup>95</sup>

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90 Moloney: 377

91 Ibid.

92 Norman Porter, *Rethinking Unionism: An Alternative Vision for Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1996): xi.

93 Bruce, “Terrorists and Politics: The Case of Northern Ireland’s Loyalist Paramilitaries,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13, no. 2 (summer 2001): 30.

94 PUP, “Sharing Responsibility” (Belfast: PUP, 1985).

95 PUP, “Proposed Democratic Devolved Administration for Northern Ireland” (Belfast: Independent Unionist Group, May 1977 and Progressive Unionist Group, May 1979).

Perhaps the most significant contribution of “Sharing Responsibility” was a commitment to the “sharing of responsibility rather than power,” demonstrating an awareness of the critical need for consensus-building to foster sustainable peace.<sup>96</sup> In reference to the 1973 Sunningdale experiment and in prescient form, an excerpt from an article in *Combat*, the UVF’s magazine, states:

Whoever stands to gain from violence, it will not be the ordinary rank and file from the streets of Belfast or the farmers and factory workers of the country towns. They will be the victims, and no sham sectarian victory will change the verdict of society for them.<sup>97</sup>

Echoing this opposition to middle class tribal politics, the PUP formally launched in 1979 with a bold political philosophy of democratic socialism and community activism.<sup>98</sup> It witnessed only meager success in the 1981 local elections.

While the UVF had long been cognizant of manipulation by the political establishment, UDA political awareness had only been awakened by the 1974 UWC strike and did not come to fruition until 1977 when Paisley initiated another general strike to demand tougher security against the IRA. The grounds for the strike were insufficient to galvanize the sort of support that Sunningdale had rallied, and Paisley again called on the UDA to provide coercive power to ensure the strike’s success; however, when the strike failed to gain critical mass, Paisley’s commitment began to waver, leaving the UDA in the lurch. For Paisley, “his career survived, though he would never again be able

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96<sup>1</sup> PUP, “Sharing Responsibility.”

97<sup>1</sup> “Sectarianism: Who Stands to Gain?” *Combat* 1, no. 13 (April 1974).

98<sup>1</sup> Aaron Edwards, “Democratic Socialism and Sectarianism: The Northern Ireland Labour Party and the Progressive Unionist Party Compared,” *Politics* 27, no. 1 (2007): 27.

to take for granted the support of the UDA.”<sup>99</sup> For the UDA, the acute sense of betrayal marked a turning point in the organization’s political development.

In the aftermath of this incident, the UDA established the New Ulster Political Research Group (NUPRG) with Glen Barr, former chair of the 1974 strike council, as its chairman, South Belfast brigadier John McMichael as its secretary, and the UDA’s Supreme Commander Andy Tyrie as a committee member.<sup>100</sup> The NUPRG was not a constituted organization, but functioned as a political think tank to the UDA. In 1979, it produced the discussion paper “Beyond the Religious Divide,” which echoed many of the insights of “Sharing Responsibility,” including a devolved power-sharing government and a Bill of Rights. The document also recommended “negotiated independence for Ulster” as the most reliable route toward “stability and reconciliation.”<sup>101</sup> Such a progressive message of conflict transformation was received with skepticism or outright rejection, both because of the politics the paper was proposing and because of the disdain for the paramilitaries who wrote it.<sup>102</sup>

McMichael would become the critical node bridging the UDA’s political, paramilitary, and criminal elements. At the same time as he was contributing to the political debate within the NUPRG, he was also assembling his notorious “shopping list” of public figures designated for assassination by the UDA’s Ulster Freedom Fighters

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99 Wood: 68.

100 Peter Taylor: 162.

101 NUPRG, “Beyond the Religious Divide” (Belfast: NUPRG, 1979).

102 Pádraig O’Malley, *The Uncivil Wars: Ireland Today*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997): 319-320.

(UFF) murder squads.<sup>103</sup> The arrest of the gang put an end to the attacks in 1981.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the negative image generated by the UFF murders, McMichael used the platform of “Beyond the Religious Divide” to stand as the Ulster Loyalist Democratic Party (ULDP) candidate in the 1982 by-election for the South Belfast MP seat. The progressive perspective of radical loyalist politics was seen as an imposition rather than a response to grassroots interests, and such explicit mixing of politics and paramilitarism proved unacceptable to the mainstream Protestant community.<sup>105</sup> McMichael received just over one percent of the vote.<sup>106</sup>

The 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement again gave purpose to loyalist paramilitary politics, as the loyalist community feared an imposed settlement much like that of Sunningdale. The PUP rebranded itself a “fiercely British political party within the United Kingdom framework,” and reissued “Sharing Responsibility.”<sup>107</sup> The UPRG turned increasingly to advocating for the rights and empowerment of the people. In 1987, the UPRG published “Common Sense,” which called for a written constitution, a Bill of Rights, proportional representation, and a process of referendum to put the political process to the people.<sup>108</sup> The UPRG hoped that existing parties would integrate these ideas into their policies; however, the proposal seemed to fall on deaf ears.<sup>109</sup>

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103: Henry McDonald and Jim Cusack, *UDA: Inside the Heart of Loyalist Terror* (New York: Penguin, 2004): 116.

104: Ibid: 118.

105: Nelson: 178.

106: Weinberg, Leonard, ed, *Political Parties and Terrorist Groups* (London: Frank Cass and Co, 1992): 118.

107: PUP, “Agreeing to Differ for Progress” (Belfast: PUP, May 1985).

108: Ulster Political Research Group, “Common Sense: Northern Ireland – An Agreed Process” (Belfast: UPRG, 1987).

109: Spencer: 71.

This period of political development and subsequent rejection continued to fuel the cycle of paramilitarism. To fund its ongoing operations, the UDA expanded its involvement in a range of criminal financing methods including extortion, drug dealing, loan sharking, intimidation, blackmail, and threat of arson and assault.<sup>110</sup> One of the most infamous leaders of these operations was Jim Craig, a West Belfast gangster who began reporting to McMichael. Craig colluded with PIRA members to maximize the outputs of his racketeering, which fueled both UDA initiatives and personal profiteering. In December 1987, McMichael was murdered by the PIRA, and many suspect that the intelligence for the operation was provided by Craig, who feared that McMichael would soon expose his criminality.<sup>111</sup> A year later, the rising criminal leadership of the UDA forced UPRG member and UDA Supreme leader Andy Tyrrie to resign. The Inner Council underwent its most significant upheaval in 1991, when the Stevens Inquiry arrested British agent Brian Nelson who had infiltrated the UDA and rose through the ranks to become the organization's chief intelligence officer.<sup>112</sup> The exposure of such pervasive collusion sent shock waves through the organization, reinforcing the sense of betrayal by the security forces, who continued to manipulate the loyalist paramilitaries. In conjunction with the growing disillusionment with the degree of internal criminality, the UDA underwent a purge of the former leadership.<sup>113</sup>

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110<sup>3</sup> See Andrew Silke, "In Defense of the Realm: Financing Loyalist Terrorism in Northern Ireland—Part One: Extortion and Blackmail" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 21, no. 4 (1998) and "Drink, Drugs, and Rock'n'Roll: Financing Loyalist Terrorism in Northern Ireland—Part Two" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 23, no. 2 (2000).

111<sup>3</sup> Peter Taylor: 170-171.

112<sup>3</sup> McDonald and Cusack, *UDA*: 158-159.

113<sup>3</sup> David Lister and Hugh Jordan, *Mad Dog: The Rise and Fall of Johnny Adair and the 'C Company'* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2003): 64.



McMichael's son Gary would pick up the remnants of the political initiative and of his father's earlier ULDP with the establishment of the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) in 1988. The party embodied parallel objectives and challenges to those of the PUP, simultaneously empowered and inhibited by their affiliations with loyalist paramilitary organizations as the prospect of negotiations became imminent. With all-party negotiations on the horizon in January 1996, the International Body on Arms Decommissioning published its report on what would come to be known as the Mitchell Principles. The document enshrined six criteria required for parties to enter negotiations including a commitment to "democratic and exclusively peaceful means" for the resolution of conflict and the pledge for the "total disarmament of all paramilitary organizations."<sup>114</sup> The joint UVF-UDA Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) had declared a ceasefire in 1994, and the PUP and the UDP agreed to abide by the Mitchell Principles, but incidents of loyalist paramilitary violence threatened to derail the negotiations. Nonetheless, loyalists often present the violence of the early 1990s as evidence of a larger narrative of sacrifice on behalf of the mainstream Unionist politicians.<sup>115</sup> They suggest that the escalation of the military campaign with the PIRA stimulated the political process, where the politicians had failed to do so. Moreover, while the paramilitaries sought to maintain their seat at the table, the DUP continued to resist the peace process and undermined the strategy and ambitions of the loyalist paramilitaries.<sup>116</sup> These "sacrifices" of the loyalist paramilitaries ultimately rendered the

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<sup>114</sup> George J. Mitchell, John de Chastelain, and Harri Holkeri, "Report of the International Body on Arms Decommissioning" (1996).

<sup>115</sup> Peter Shirlow, Jonathan Tonge, James McAuley, and Catherine McGlynn, *Abandoning Historical Conflict?: Former Political Prisoners and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* (New York: Manchester University, 2010): 18.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid: 131.

PUP and the UDP electorally weak, and only the PUP's David Ervine and fellow former UVF member, Billy Hutchinson gained seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly that formed as a result of the Good Friday Agreement. The UDP was consigned to history.

In the decade since the Agreement, the UDA and the UVF have been plagued by internal feuding, due to both the failure of loyalist politicians to convince their constituents of the benefits of the Agreement and the persistence of localized gang warfare. In 2000, Johnny Adair and his renegade West Belfast UDA 'C Company' collaborated with the Loyalist Volunteer Force—a splinter group formed by the Mid-Ulster UVF leader “King Rat” Billy Wright in 1996—to incite some of the worst feuding between the UVF and the UDA on the Shankill.<sup>117</sup> This gang violence and territoriality only reinforced the image of loyalists as criminals and gangsters and has strangled progress in loyalist working class neighborhoods. The Inner Council expelled Adair and his cronies from the organization in 2002 and exiled him and his supporters from Northern Ireland a year later.<sup>118</sup>

Despite the perpetuation of vigilantism and crime, active loyalist paramilitarism seems to be approaching some sort of endgame in the past few years. In May 2006, Spence—long retired, but still a spokesman for the organization—announced that the UVF and RHC would “civilianize.” In June 2009, the organization decommissioned their weapons. In November 2007, the UDA announced that it was standing down the UFF and ceasing recruitment and in January 2010 it decommissioned its weapons.<sup>119</sup> The

117) Bruce, “Turf War and Peace: Loyalist Paramilitaries Since 1994,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 3 (2004): 513-514.

118) Lister and Jordan: 249.

119) “Ulster Defense Association Remembrance Day Statement.” CAIN. University of Ulster. 11 November 2007. [cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/uda/uda111107.htm](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/uda/uda111107.htm). 30 April 2010.

UDA had only one month remaining before the February 9, 2010 deadline, when the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) mandate would officially end and paramilitary groups that had not yet decommissioned would be susceptible to criminalization. Although the UVF and the UDA remain illegal and their political branches remain fragile, there is an indisputable shift within the organizations and willingness to engage in a process of fundamental change.

### ***Developing a Current Context***

Conflict transformation formally began with the negotiations leading to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, which marked the shift from past to future. As the official end of the Troubles, the Agreement instituted a devolved mandatory power-sharing government at Stormont. While republicans transitioned seamlessly into the post-conflict society, the UVF and the UDA loyalist paramilitaries have only been marginally successful at participating effectively in community mobilization and at achieving substantive political representation. They continue to suffer from the multiple deprivations of their communities, which limit their access to opportunity; from the polarization of Stormont that prevents their entrance into politics; from stigmatization that entrenches negative social stereotypes; from their own inability or refusal to dismantle the vestigial structures of the paramilitary organizations that inhibit reintegration; and from their limited civic and political capacity that constrain the ability of credible leaders to mobilize community activism. In the decade since the Agreement, the loyalists have made only nominal progress in the process of conflict transformation to eliminate these impediments and move toward full engagement in the established peace.

Moreover, Stormont and civil society organizations have implemented few initiatives to support them in that process. The deaths of Ervine and other PUP leaders such as Billy Mitchell and Billy McCaughey dealt further blows to attaining these goals. Still, in May 2007, Gusty Spence, godfather of the contemporary UVF and Ervine's mentor, demonstrated that the process had not been completely derailed. In a public statement, Spence announced that the UVF and its sister organization, the Red Hand Commando (RHC) "will assume a non-military, civilianised, role."<sup>120</sup> This seemingly definitive commitment to conflict transformation has translated into little change in practice, and in May 2010, members of the UVF murdered former member Bobby Moffett, both as a means to eliminate an internal threat and as a message to the wider loyalist community. The subsequent report of the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC)—a special organization established in 2004 to produce biannual reports monitoring the activity of paramilitary groups, and which produced its last report this spring—concluded that the UVF central leadership sanctioned the attack.<sup>121</sup> The execution, which occurred on a Friday afternoon at point blank range amid crowds of Shankill Road shoppers, was a similarly definitive statement that transformation has a long way to go.

The reasons for the limited success of conflict transformation within loyalist paramilitary communities are complex and deeply entrenched. Many of the reasons have become embedded in the accepted loyalist narrative and stereotypes, which obscure these reasons, but also make them especially deserving of a comprehensive analysis that identifies the critical incentives and disincentives for realistic conflict transformation.

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<sup>120</sup> Gusty Spence, "UVF statement in full." BBC online. 3 May 2007.

<sup>121</sup> IMC, "Twenty-Fourth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission" (London: The Stationary Office, September 2010): 3-4.

Despite the general state of peace in Northern Ireland, the current landscape continues to compound this puzzle rather than to clarify it. Four challenges are particularly salient in the present course of conflict transformation, including ongoing financial difficulties, rising fears of sectarianism, ambiguity regarding amnesty and justice, and new political configurations in advance of the May 2011 elections.

Over the past several years, Northern Ireland has been experiencing a severe economic downturn, both as a consequence of the larger global crisis and as a product of local conditions. The latest figures from the United Kingdom Office for National Statistics show that the UK economy is experiencing extremely slow growth and declined by 0.5% in the last quarter of 2010.<sup>122</sup> These trends have compelled Westminster to undertake a comprehensive budgetary consolidation, cutting its public spending by £81 billion by 2015, including a 6.9% cut in subvention to Northern Ireland.<sup>123</sup> A significant element of the UK austerity measures is a two year freeze in public sector pay. This could be particularly detrimental to Northern Ireland, which is highly dependent on the public sector, accounting for nearly a third of all jobs.<sup>124</sup> Current statistics already place Northern Ireland unemployment at 7.3% and at 20.3% for 18-24 year olds.<sup>125</sup> Although these statistics remain below both the UK and European Union average rates, Northern Ireland's heavy reliance on Westminster and on the public sector and the absence of a

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122' "GDP Growth." Office for National Statistics. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>.

123' "Spending Review 2010." HM Treasury. (October 2010).

124' "Facts and Figures from the Interdepartmental Business Register (IDBR)." Thirteenth Edition. Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Investment. 30 December 2010.

125' "Monthly Labour Market Report." Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Investment (April 2011).

concerted strategy for repair threaten further financial decline. Many of those hardest hit are working class communities and former paramilitaries.

Moreover, Peace III funding, the European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland, is due to end in 2013, threatening the work of many local initiatives and support services.<sup>126</sup> Community development organizations—a critical element of conflict transformation in working class communities—constitute a significant number of these local projects, and many receive funding exclusively from Peace III. These impending shifts are causing concern that an increasing number of deprived youth and former paramilitaries will lose a key source of employment.

This financial austerity and unemployment—especially for young adults—are fueling fears of fresh sectarian violence, which defined the Troubles for so long. In particular, scholars and government agencies are increasingly warning of the rise of the Real IRA (RIRA), which splintered from the Provisional IRA (PIRA) over political difference in 1997. In a recent report, Dr. Martyn Frampton claimed that “the danger posed by violent, dissident Irish republicans is now at its greatest level in over a decade.”<sup>127</sup> The report attributes 36 bomb, mortar, and gun attacks from January to October 2010 to the two factions of the RIRA. The IMC reports covering similar periods largely substantiate this data.<sup>128</sup> This heightened level of violence and likelihood of future attacks is palpable throughout Northern Ireland, but also in England, prompting the MI5

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<sup>126</sup> For more information, see “PEACE III: EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 2007-2013.” Special EU Programmes Body. [http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/peace\\_iii\\_operational\\_programme.pdf](http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/peace_iii_operational_programme.pdf).

<sup>127</sup> Martyn Frampton, “The Return of the Militants: Violent Dissident Republicanism,” International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (November 2010).

<sup>128</sup> IMC, “The Twenty-Fifth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission.” (London: The Stationary Office, November 2010).

to raise the national alert level from “moderate” to “substantial,” and most recently to “severe” within Northern Ireland.<sup>129</sup>

The RIRA’s most lethal attack occurred in March 2009, when it shot dead two soldiers and a policeman at the Massereene Army Barracks. In response, leading Sinn Féin members condemned the attacks and the security services launched a rigorous and successful operation to arrest suspects. Although the incident sparked considerable concern over loyalist paramilitary reprisals, the UVF and UDA leadership effectively prevented retaliation through extensive internal discussions.<sup>130</sup> Nonetheless, in the event of future incidents, the question remains as to whether the loyalist paramilitaries retain sufficient cohesion to prevent a more violent outcome and if they will increasingly defer to the security services to contend with these security concerns.

While sectarianism remains a latent threat, ambiguity about amnesty and justice has become an increasingly significant factor in conflict transformation and the current trajectory of the loyalist paramilitaries. These issues of culpability have deep roots in the history of the Troubles, but their more recent manifestation hinges on the “Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement” document adopted by the British and Irish governments in 2001. The document states that:

Both Governments also recognize that there is an issue to be addressed... about supporters of organizations now on ceasefire against whom there are outstanding prosecutions, and in some cases extradition proceedings, for offences committed before 10 April 1998... The Governments accept that... such prosecutions [are] not to be pursued and will as soon as possible, and in any event before the end of the

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129 See the UK Home Office website: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/counter-terrorism/current-threat-level>.

130 David Sharrock, “We will not retaliate over latest killings, loyalist paramilitary brigadier promises.” *The Times*. 12 March 2009. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article5891514.ece>.

year, take such steps as are necessary in their jurisdictions to resolve this difficulty so that those concerned are no longer pursued.<sup>131</sup>

This proposal effectively grants former paramilitaries amnesty for acts of violence committed before April 1998. This metaphorical line in the sand offers paramilitaries an opportunity to benefit from the broader societal process of normalization.

Nonetheless, several criminal justice campaigns seem to impede the fulfillment of this agreement. Particularly notable is the Historical Enquiries Team (HET), a special unit of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) that investigates unresolved cases from the Troubles in an attempt to offer closure to victims and their families. Although the HET cannot recommend the prosecution of paramilitaries for crimes committed before 1998, the investigations exacerbate the relative closure that the amnesty deal sought to provide for former paramilitaries and their communities. Moreover, the HET seems to maintain a disproportionate emphasis on loyalist crimes over republican ones, generating considerable tension with loyalist communities. Specifically, of the 72 investigations, all but two have been loyalist cases; however, of the over 3600 deaths during the Troubles, only 30 percent were attributed to the loyalist violence.<sup>132</sup> A total of 65 of the 70 loyalist investigations have occurred as a part of the criminal enquiry Operation Ballast, renamed Operation Stafford when it came under the auspices of the Serious Crime Branch of the PSNI in December 2009.<sup>133</sup> This ongoing series of

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<sup>131</sup> "Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement," Northern Ireland Office and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (August 2001).

<sup>132</sup> "Table 16—Responsibility for Deaths" in David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney, and Chris Thornton, *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women, and Children who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1999): 1482.

<sup>133</sup> "HET denies anti-loyalist bias claim," UTV. 15 March 2011. <http://www.u.tv/news/HET-denies-anti-loyalist-bias-claim/b160e330-142e-444d-81ab-9773e676ccbc>.



investigations seeks to expose the murders, crime, and collusion perpetrated by the North Belfast UVF, especially within the renegade 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of Mount Vernon.<sup>134</sup> Despite the promise of amnesty for incidents before 1998, the amnesty deal does not exonerate paramilitaries who have continued such illicit and violent activities. In October, the PSNI, acting under the mandate of Operation Stafford, carried out several raids in the nearby loyalist estate of Rathcoole, sparking riots within the community. Amid reports of callous conduct by the PSNI, hundreds of young people rallied violently in the streets, supposedly coordinated by UVF gunmen.<sup>135</sup> Similar incidents took place in Ballyclare and Carrickfergus in the preceding weeks.

This friction between the loyalists and the police has also been inflamed by the resurrection of the controversial supergrass system, which was a policing tactic used in the 1980s to compel paramilitaries to inform against their colleagues.<sup>136</sup> Last year, two UVF members involved in the high-profile murder of UDA commander Tommy English offered evidence indicting alleged members of the Mount Vernon UVF battalion.<sup>137</sup> This incident and growing speculation that a former UVF brigadier has ‘turned supergrass’ continue to fuel tensions within the existing membership for fear of arrest and reopening the past.<sup>138</sup> Collectively, these events have provoked significant doubts about the

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134: “Nuala O’Loan to oversee UVF probe,” BBC. 18 November 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-11788835>.

135: “UVF rioters wanted to send a message to the police,” *New Letter*. 28 October 2010. [http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/local/uvf\\_rioters\\_wanted\\_to\\_send\\_message\\_to\\_police\\_1\\_1868016](http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/local/uvf_rioters_wanted_to_send_message_to_police_1_1868016).

136: “Northern Ireland supergrass terrorist trials,” BBC. 26 February 2010. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/8538895.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/8538895.stm).

137: Henry McDonald, “UVF brothers to turn ‘supergrass’ in 10-year-old murder case,” *The Observer*. 3 January 2010. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jan/03/uvf-supergrass-trial-stewart>.

138: “UVF boss ‘to turn supergrass,’” UTV. 28 September 2010. <http://www.u.tv/News/UVF-boss-to-turn-supergrass/36868762-efc2-4bb3-b0b5-c1bc7eefc9d>.

execution of justice and have established a widespread perception within the loyalist community of a double standard biased against the loyalists, which continue to cripple initiatives for conflict transformation.

Increasingly, the loyalists are beginning to awaken to the recognition that political engagement is a vital tool to rectify the lack of local opportunity and the perpetuation of loyalist exclusion. Many contend that the critical significance of Sinn Féin in Stormont has enabled the party's former paramilitary wing, PIRA, to largely elude the persistent criminal investigations that have plagued the loyalists. Rather, some suggest that officials fear that targeting former PIRA members could have a serious destabilizing effect on the current political status quo. Without political representation in the Northern Ireland Assembly, the UVF and the UDA remain outsiders, subject to the ongoing scrutiny of the HET, the media, and the general public without political ramifications.

During last May's Westminster election, the loyalists began to see a window of opportunity when Peter Robinson, the establishment politician and leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) lost his seat to Alliance Party candidate Naomi Long for the East Belfast MP seat.<sup>139</sup> Just a few months earlier, Robinson's wife, Iris, a DUP MLA and MP for Strangford stepped down amid reports of a sex scandal and mental health issues. This perceived coup of the DUP and its 'Robinson Dynasty' has reinvigorated loyalist communities, who increasingly perceive the upcoming Assembly election as an opportunity to harness this growing political awareness and break the cycle of loyalist electoral stagnation. Although the initiatives for mobilization within working class loyalist communities are still in their embryonic phase, there is a significant push

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139: "General election 2010: Northern Ireland's first minister Peter Robinson loses seat." *The Guardian*. 7 May 2010. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/may/07/peter-robinson-northern-ireland-loses-seat>.

for new political parties and new initiatives for civic engagement, with contributions from both the paramilitary organizations and the communities that support them.

The picture that emerges from these four challenges—ongoing financial difficulties, rising fears of sectarianism, ambiguity regarding amnesty and justice, and new political configurations—is one of a profoundly complex contemporary context for loyalism and its capacity for conflict transformation. This confluence of past and present represents a critical turning point for the loyalist paramilitaries as they begin to seriously contemplate their roles, responsibilities, and potential in Northern Irish society since the Good Friday Agreement. The preceding historical assessment has illuminated several significant themes in considering how the loyalists are beginning to move forward. Most importantly, the historical interpolation of paramilitarism and politics indicates a precedent for the loyalists' current initiatives and conceptions and for the obstacles that continue to impede their progress. Although the pervasive stereotypes suggest that the loyalists lacked a political awareness, this analysis has demonstrated that manipulation by politicians, as exhibited by the UWC strike, and independent attempts at engaging in party politics, such as the VPP and ULDP, have long been integral to loyalist considerations about alternatives to violent means of enacting change. This history suggests that the loyalists have a relevant foundation for current conflict transformation.

#### **IV. TAKING RESPONSIBILITY: CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION IN PRACTICE**

The most recent iteration of conflict transformation within the UVF and the UDA emerged around the time of the Saint Andrews Agreement in 2007, which restored the Northern Ireland Assembly that had stalled several times since the Good Friday Agreement. The peace process with the republicans seemed secure and the unionist political establishment was growing predictable. The loyalist paramilitary organizations had expelled the most notorious violent and criminal elements and were beginning to speak substantively about distancing themselves from paramilitary endeavors. Without the political leadership of David Ervine, Billy Mitchell, and Billy McCaughey, the PUP began to forge a new path. Concurrently, the UDA's community initiatives were beginning to flourish. Within the context of the history of the loyalist paramilitaries and of the four contemporary challenges—ongoing financial difficulties, rising fears of sectarianism, ambiguity regarding amnesty and justice, and new political configurations—this section reintroduces the analytical framework of conflict transformation. Through the lenses of *restructuring relationships*, *building capacity*, and *reconceptualizing norms*, this section assesses the extent to which the loyalist paramilitaries are engaging in conflict transformation. Although I explore each of these three processes separately, they are inherently overlapping and interdependent. In the analysis of each of the three processes of conflict transformation, I use the three indicators of taking responsibility—*behaving correctly*, *being accountable*, and/or *acting independently* and provide a summary of these findings at the end of each section.

### ***Restructuring Relationships***

Throughout the history of the Troubles, the loyalist paramilitaries maintained complex relationships with their working class communities and with the mainstream loyalist politicians. To the people, they were defenders against republican violence and vigilantes against local anti-social behavior; but they were also criminals blackmailing and intimidating neighbors and drug dealers fueling the addictions of young people. To the politicians, they were pro-state militias and sub-state security; but they were also “cannon fodder” for the state’s dirty work and scapegoats for its political shortcomings. While these relationships persist, the past few years have added new dimensions that are challenging old structures. In order to simplify the duality and increasing complexity embedded in these relationships, I adopt the concept of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) for analyzing the relationship of the paramilitaries and the people and the concept of ‘unionist unity’ to analyze that of the paramilitaries and the politicians.

### *Paramilitaries and the People*

On January 10, 1998, the *Belfast Telegraph* published a poll on the Protestant and Catholic priorities for peace. The number one priority for Protestant communities was the disbanding of all paramilitary groups; however, loyalist paramilitary influence remains the defining factor in the relationships of the organizations to the grassroots.<sup>140</sup> Given the expressed priority of Protestant communities, I use the concept of DDR as the essential process by which the loyalist paramilitaries can restructure their relationship with the people. This process of DDR is complex, protracted, and arduous even when undertaken by coordinated and experienced international actors. DDR is broadly defined

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<sup>140</sup> Colin Irwin, *The People's Process in Northern Ireland* (New York: Palgrave, 2002): 168.

as “a process introduced following conflict and directed primarily at ensuring the transition of combatants into civilian life.”<sup>141</sup> In Northern Ireland, the responsibility for DDR was ceded largely to local actors and to the loyalist paramilitaries themselves, which only recently have begun to recognize the incentives for change in lieu of persistent incentives for inertia. If successful, the process of DDR would represent the most significant restructuring of relationships between the paramilitaries and their communities by liberating communities from fear of paramilitary coercion and enabling constructive interactions across all elements of loyalist working class communities. In the past thirteen years, the UVF and the UDA have taken responsibility for significant steps away from the violence and paramilitary functions that defined the organizations during and immediately after the Troubles; however, the process towards fully disbanding the organizations and strengthening relationships with their communities remains stunted.

Within the three-pronged agenda of DDR, the UVF and the UDA have only successfully achieved disarmament, as per the standards of the IICD. Although they have taken several steps towards demobilization, including the ‘standing down’ of their military and youth wings and the creation of ex-prisoners associations including the UVF’s Ex-Prisoners Interpretive Center (EPIC) and the UDA’s Charter, the relationship between the paramilitaries and their communities remains largely unchanged, if not further damaged due to the protracted nature of the process. Despite the commitment of the paramilitary organizations to the stipulations of the Mitchell Principles and the Good Friday Agreement for total disarmament, the loyalists did not undertake any discernable steps until 2009, four years after PIRA disbanded and with perpetual appeals by the IICD.

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<sup>141</sup> Robert Muggah, “No Magic Bullet: A Critical Perspective on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) and Weapons Reduction in Post-conflict Contexts,” *The Round Table* 94, no. 379 (April 2005): 242.

Moreover, reports surfaced that the UDA had requested millions of pounds for the funding of loyalist community initiatives and additional prisoner releases as a prerequisite for full decommissioning of their weapons.<sup>142</sup> The public reaction was tepid at best for progress that was “too little too late.” The loyalists maintain, however, that the process first required a “decommissioning of mindsets” that included widespread organizational consultations beyond the mere choice to disarm.<sup>143</sup> The DDR process has since stagnated as neither the UVF nor the UDA had designed definitive plans for demobilization, which would maintain the momentum of decommissioning.

Recent events, however, have jumpstarted that process again. Despite the brutality of the incident, the murder of Bobby Moffett and the subsequent public outcry have motivated the UVF to resurrect its plans for civilianization, as per Spence’s statement in 2007. In late 2010, the UVF with support from the PUP and nearly a dozen outside advisers, including church ministers Chris Hudson and Gary Mason, former Belfast city councillor Will Glendinning, and academic Peter Shirlow, outlined a blueprint to reorganize its members within a structure that draws on existing political capacity and community development work to inform a comprehensive program of regional and local reform. The blueprint delineates ten strands of work: 1) politics, 2) community work, 3) social work, 4) youth work, 5) interface work, 6) restorative justice, 7) prisons and ex-prisoners, 8) Somme societies, 9) bands, and 10) culture, literature, drama, and music. Although many UVF members are currently involved in at least one of these ten strands, the blueprint establishes a formal set of options for those members

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142<sup>1</sup> Vincent Kearney. “UDA seek cash in return for guns.” *BBC News*. 19 June 2009. [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/8110176.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/8110176.stm). 9 April 2010.

143<sup>1</sup> Kris Brown and Corinna Hauswedell, “Burying the Hatchet: The Decommissioning of Paramilitary Arms in Northern Ireland,” Bonn International Center for Conversion. Brief 22. (2002).

still involved in violence and criminality. Despite the critical thinking on coordinating multiple activities and multiple levels of work, it remains unclear whether there is a concerted strategy for implementation, which requires mobilizing the membership and the resources to put this plan into action. According to East Belfast UVF leader Jim Wilson, the civilianization initiative has met with little internal resistance thus far and has received a nod of approval from chief brigadier John ‘Bunter’ Graham.<sup>144</sup> Recent news reports indicate that the initiative has continued is progressing, with workshops at the Farset community association and with attempts to begin to designate new roles for UVF members.<sup>145</sup>

Brian Ervine, current PUP leader and brother of the late David Ervine, acknowledges that “the UVF is late in giving its personnel alternatives.”<sup>146</sup> Nonetheless, a consistent theme among the loyalist community is the need to maintain the social capital of the paramilitaries in order to most effectively harness them as “a transforming force for good.”<sup>147</sup> Sociologist and scholar Robert Putnam defines social capital as the “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.”<sup>148</sup> This social dynamic helps build civil society and self-help organizations, especially critical in working communities.

Moreover, research suggests that former politically-motivated prisoners demonstrate less

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144: Jim Wilson. Interview with the author. PUP Office. 14 January 2011.

145: Brian Rowan, “UVF terror group embarks on process of ‘civilianising’ its members,” *Belfast Telegraph*. 27 January 2011. <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/uvf-terror-group-embarks-on-process-of-civilianising-its-members-15065275.html>.

146: Brian Ervine. Interview with the author. PUP Office. 11 January 2011.

147: Ibid.

148: Robert Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (1995): 67.



of a propensity for high-risk behavior such as criminality, violence, and anti-social activities if they maintain strong paramilitary associations and ideological proximity from the increasingly progressive loyalist paramilitary leadership.<sup>149</sup> Members of the loyalist community consistently cite the value of internal social cohesion as a mechanism for reducing internal criminality and resistance to conflict transformation, but also as reason why the UVF and the UDA have been unable to move more promptly on plans for organizational transformation. Noting the dissident republican groups that formed in the wake of the PIRA's shift to a political process, a leading UVF figure asserted that the organization has attempted to maintain a "diligent and patient approach...to bring together that critical mass of membership so that people don't feel left behind and they don't feel abandoned."<sup>150</sup>

Although it presently lacks a plan for civilianization or demobilization, the UDA espouses this same respect for social solidarity, which was reinforced by decades of violence, but remains complicated by the size of and diversity within the organization. One of the initiatives that the UDA is attempting to establish is the Ulster Defense Union (UDU). The UDA believes that the UDU was a resistance movement against the Second Home Rule Bill in 1893 and claims direct lineage despite limited evidence of its existence. Whether real or mythical, the East Belfast UDA has resurrected the UDU as a body "to retire combatants into a peaceful organization."<sup>151</sup> According to the UDU's North Down administrator, David Stitt, the UDU strives to maintain camaraderie and to

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149 Clare D. Dwyer, "Risk, Politics, and the 'Scientification' of Political Judgment: Prisoner Release and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland," *British Journal of Criminology* 47, no. 5 (2007): 788.

150 Interview with senior UVF member. Belfast. 10 January 2011.

151 David Stitt. Interview with the author. Charter NI. 13 April 2010.

contribute to community development and empowerment. Although this initiative has begun to absorb former members of the East Belfast UDA, it has received only moderate support from the rest of the UDA leadership. As the UDA's most public figure, South Belfast brigadier Jackie McDonald advocates for an "Old Boys' Association," but is adamant that the name of the UDA is upheld. "I want UDA people to feel that in ten years' time, they're still in the UDA," he says.<sup>152</sup> Given the continued contributions of the UDA to community work, several among the leadership believe that "there will come a day when [the politicians] are going to have to justify the organization," meaning that Stormont will restore its legality without requiring the organization to disband.<sup>153</sup>

This premium on organizational pride has its limits. East Belfast UPRG leader Frankie Gallagher contends that the UDA's current attempts at civilianization have been insufficient to change the underlying structures and composition of the UDA. Although Gallagher recognizes the value of the UDU, he also suggests that rather than the Executive Council trying to manufacture demobilization, "if we were to back off, we would get more results...most people will merge back into their communities, and people like ourselves will try and keep what social capital there was."<sup>154</sup> An organic dissolution of the organization, Gallagher argues, is what will provide the space for former members of the loyalist paramilitary organizations to develop as leaders and to act independently to enhance their relationships with their communities. He suggests that in many cases, this process is already underway. "It's gone beyond splits. If you understand the character of

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152 Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 13 April 2010.

153 John Bunting. Interview with the author. Groundwork Northern Ireland. 23 April 2010.

154 Frankie Gallagher. Interview with the author. Charter NI. 6 January 2011.

the organization...we only became federal whenever there were things to do.”<sup>155</sup> While the DDR process has compelled some among the leadership to attempt a more consistent state of unified decision-making, the leaders of the divergent brigade areas still tend to meet only for extenuating circumstances.

Despite their stated desire for the paramilitaries to disband, loyalist working class communities remain paradoxically hesitant about the actual dissolution of the UVF and the UDA, which stems from a historical reliance on the paramilitaries to dole out local justice, however brutal. Throughout the history of the Troubles, the Royal Ulster Constabulary police force remained predominantly occupied with countering acts of paramilitarism rather than focusing on community issues, which fostered a mutual mistrust between the police and the working class in loyalist neighborhoods and a local dependence on the paramilitaries for law and order. Although the PSNI has responded to many of the recommendations of the 1999 Patten Report for police reform, many loyalist working class residents continue to complain of inadequate service or inefficient response from the police, with growing sentiments that the PSNI is merely the “Police Serving Nationalist Interests.”<sup>156</sup> Therefore, community members continue to call on the paramilitaries for instant gratification law and order, especially for instances of antisocial behavior by youth. A leading UVF figure claims “the communities are slower to move away from [paramilitary law and order] than the actual organization.”<sup>157</sup> He suggests that the current relationship places the all of the risk of local vigilantism on the paramilitary

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155 Ibid.

156 Jonny Byrne and Lisa Monaghan, “Policing Loyalist and Republican Communities: Understanding Key Issues for Local Communities and the PSNI” (Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research, 2008).

157 Interview with senior UVF member. Belfast. 10 January 2011.

and offers all of the benefit to the community. Therefore, the community remains tolerant of the status quo.

While the loyalist paramilitaries recognize the insufficient capacity of the PSNI, the leadership is beginning to insist on a shift. “You have to do your job better to make our job easier,” McDonald demands.<sup>158</sup> Despite pressure from their communities to continue administering direct tactics of community policing, the UVF and the UDA leadership is attempting to remove the stigma of “touting,” or informing and encouraging its constituents instead to report incidents to the PSNI. Moreover, the paramilitary leaders are taking the initiative to facilitate the relationship between the PSNI and loyalist working class communities by acting as liaisons with district policing partnerships and working in coordination with the PSNI to solve local cases. “There’s only one law of this land. It’s the PSNI,” says South Belfast UPRG representative Colin Halliday.<sup>159</sup> This insistence on restructuring relationships is contributing to community confidence in mainstream mechanisms of law and order.

Nonetheless, the under-resourcing and delayed evolution of the PSNI reinforce the roles of the UVF and the UDA as essential arbiters of local justice in response to contentious community issues, such as sectarian flags in Kilkeel, bonfires in Ballynahinch, and parades in West Belfast, which have all sparked violent sectarian activity in the past. “I can tell you categorically, if I went out there and made a statement on that field now that the UDA were to fold from twelve o’clock at night, there would be mass hysteria in this area...because they haven’t gotten to the stage yet where they can look after their

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<sup>158</sup> Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 13 April 2010.

<sup>159</sup> Colin Halliday. Interview with the author. BSCR. 21 April 2010.

own future,” claims West Belfast UPRG representative William ‘Twister’ McQuiston.<sup>160</sup> The ongoing disconnect between the PSNI and the loyalist communities therefore represents a formidable obstacle to UVF and UDA ambitions to civilianize and an ongoing incentive to a paramilitary response to community needs through the provision of local justice.

The style of justice, however, has largely shifted from one of brutal vigilantism, paramilitary punishment beatings, and kneecappings to community policing. This attempt at civilianization has undermined the paramilitaries’ role as community defenders in relation to community and criminal offenders. Traditionally, the status and power of UVF and the UDA “has come from the barrel of a gun.”<sup>161</sup> Without physical force, the loyalist paramilitaries are quickly losing their ability to curb local disorder and crime. As McDonald puts it, “the UDA has the influence, but it’s not going to have the influence forever. If they don’t use the influence they have today, it’s not going to be here tomorrow, because we’re going to be yesterday’s men.”<sup>162</sup> McDonald’s statement is perhaps most indicative of the rising tide of youth offenders, who suffer from a “conflict deficit,” a romanticization of the conflict and resentment for having missed out.<sup>163</sup> These young people often glorify paramilitarism and remain aloof to the admonishments of those paramilitary members who are themselves turning to peaceful means.

Decommissioning and the relinquishing of arms have also diminished the coercive authority and internal accountability of the UVF and the UDA leaderships in

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<sup>160</sup> William McQuiston. Interview with the author. Prisoners in Partnership. 2 April 2010.

<sup>161</sup> O’Malley: 341.

<sup>162</sup> Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 7 January 2011.

<sup>163</sup> John Howcroft. Interview with the author. Groundwork Northern Ireland. 23 April 2010.

relation to the remaining criminal elements within the organizations. A senior UVF figure cited that “internal housekeeping has been severely problematic because with there being—or there should be—no physical acts of violence perpetrated by that organization, then it’s quite hard to discipline people”<sup>164</sup> This has led to the perpetuation of criminality by members who at least claim affiliation with the loyalist paramilitaries. Brian Ervine explains that “these are people who wrap themselves in a Union flag...to cover their nefarious deeds.”<sup>165</sup> Nonetheless, these criminals continue to draw the attention of the IMC. In its most recent publications, the IMC maintained that criminality within the UVF and the UDA is largely for personal profiteering rather than for organizational purposes and that the leadership of both organizations has been active in trying to subdue this activity.<sup>166</sup> However, the UDA denies that such criminality exists in all geographic areas. “Come out and say whatever area it is. Embarrass us if you have to,” McDonald demands, “Because I will not be guilty by association.”<sup>167</sup> The North Belfast UDA has been particularly vocal in defending that internal criminals are in fact criminal opportunists appropriating the name of the organization to instill fear; however, such assertive campaigns against internal criminality have also “invited charges of dirty hands.”<sup>168</sup> Independent watchdogs, such as the respected Presbyterian minister Reverend

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164 Interview with senior UVF member. Belfast. 10 January 2011.

165 Brian Ervine.

166 IMC, “Twenty-Fifth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission” (London: The Stationary Office, November 2010): 17-22.

167 Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. Belfast South Community Resources. 13 April 2010.

168 Carolyn Gallaher, *After the Peace: Loyalist Paramilitaries in Post-Accord Northern Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2007): 14.

Robert Beckett, have therefore begun to speak on behalf of the UDA and verify their claims.<sup>169</sup>

Both the loyalist paramilitaries and their working class communities share the fear that completely disbanding the organizations will exacerbate the scourge of criminality. There is an uncomfortable recognition that the PSNI is responsible for coping with crime, but a lack of faith in its ability to do so. While the UVF and the UDA appear committed in principle to shifting responsibility for fighting crime to the PSNI, many among the leadership argue that in the absence of a strong police force, the loyalist paramilitaries are best placed to respond. McDonald suggests a collaborative approach with the PSNI, but notes that “[the PSNI] is afraid of us dealing with it the old way, going and shooting the fella who’s doing it or putting him out of the country. I think if they knew that we were going to deal with [the criminals] through due process, they might be more willing to tell us and point out where the problems are.”<sup>170</sup> Gallagher asserts that until the UVF and the UDA demobilize they are in fact complicit in the criminality. “When you remove the paramilitary, it’s only the person,” he claims. “You’re taking away the structures that empower criminals to oppress their own communities”<sup>171</sup> This change represents the essential contribution of DDR to restructuring relationships.

Nonetheless, the competing philosophies about the impact of demobilization on criminality remain inconclusive. Therefore, the paramilitaries continue to deliberate on whether to demobilize those committed to peace or to wait until they can coerce the

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169<sup>1</sup> Andy Martin, “Has the terror group really changed its spots?” *BBC News*. 10 September 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-11265130>.

170<sup>1</sup> Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 7 January 2011.

171<sup>1</sup> Frankie Gallagher. Interview with the author. Charter NI. 6 January 2011.

diehards and the criminals to transform with the organizations. One senior loyalist summed up the debate: “this is the conundrum for civic society to understand. In order for an organization who is several thousand strong, who were very much hard bitten by the conflict, in order to civilianize those people, there’s a process, and it takes the discipline and the structure of that organization to exist to allow that transformation to happen.”<sup>172</sup> The future of the relationship between the loyalist paramilitaries and their respective communities will be defined by the current process of civilianization within the UVF, the prospective process of demobilization within the UDA, and the extent to which each organization takes responsibility for stimulating progress.

### *Paramilitaries and the Politicians*

The relationship between the UVF and the UDA and their political representatives has long been plagued by a historical memory of betrayal and exclusion and by a lack of viable alternatives to the establishment politicians. Although the DUP remains the establishment party within working class loyalist communities, its candidates tend to uphold conservative middle class values that conflict with the character of working class communities. Rather than voting on policy issues, working class constituents and loyalist paramilitary leaders continue to succumb to the political rhetoric and fear tactics of the DUP and its platform of ‘unionist unity.’ This ideal purports that unionists of all shades, including the UUP, the DUP, the Traditional Unionist Voice, and the PUP, and of all socioeconomic classes, from the highly privileged Malone Road to the deeply deprived

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with senior UVF member. Belfast. 10 January 2011.



Shankill, select a mutually accepted candidate for each district to more effectively contest the electoral challenge presented by Sinn Féin. As voiced by North Belfast UPRG representative, John Howcroft, “there’s not room within unionism for so many brands on the shelf, but we need to make a coherent brand for unionism.”<sup>173</sup> This strategy seeks to prevent the division of unionist votes, but also maintains the inherently sectarian and exclusionary motive of keeping Sinn Féin out of power, not for the purposes of policy, but for the purpose of maintaining the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. The DUP’s rhetoric of unionist unity not only undermines the success of Sinn Féin, but also destroys the prospects of Protestant working class political representatives and has prolonged the process of restoring the social contract with working class constituents.

According to the Belfast Agreement, the seat of the First Minister is drawn from the largest political designation—either unionist or nationalist—in Northern Ireland. During the 2007 Saint Andrews Agreement, the DUP renegotiated this provision so that the First Minister seat goes to the largest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly. This side deal ensured not only that Ian Paisley became the First Minister, but also that the DUP could give purpose to its propaganda of unionist unity in order to engender the subservience of the working class communities.<sup>174</sup> The DUP continues to argue that the failure of working class constituents to vote for the DUP would result in the appointment of Martin McGuinness to First Minister and the subsequent reestablishment of a United Ireland. In reality, any proposed change in the status of Northern Ireland would require a comprehensive referendum by the people.

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<sup>173</sup> John Howcroft. Interview with the author. North Belfast Community Development. 13 January 2011.

<sup>174</sup> Brian Ervine.

The UDA leadership tends to perceive a different meaning in the vocabulary of unionist unity. Working with the UPRG in 2004, the organization introduced the ‘John Gregg Initiative’ to create a roadmap for conflict transformation whereby the UDA would a) work towards the day when there would no longer be a need for the UDA and the UFF; b) desist from all military activity; c) develop a strategy for the organization which would be one of community development, job creation, social inclusion, and community politics; and d) work diligently with other political parties and the two governments to create an environment which would secure a lasting peace.<sup>175</sup> In particular, this last tenet enshrined a value of unionist unity, whereby the UPRG would not pursue elected office and contribute to the fragmentation of the unionist vote, but would make the unionist establishment relevant to the grassroots. The UPRG envisioned a unionist unity that was vertical in nature, linking the politicians to working class communities, rather than a horizontal system of electoral pacts between parties.

This vertical conception of unionist unity exemplifies the theory of a social contract between the state and its citizens, whereby the governed respect the sovereignty of the state in return for physical, social, and political protection. If the state fails to fulfill the social contract, however, “the people [are] absolved from their responsibility to observe the civil laws.”<sup>176</sup> The loyalist paramilitaries believe that they have abided by the social contract, using violence when the state failed to protect their communities and contributing to community development when Stormont failed to provide services.

While conflict represents the breakdown of the social contract, conflict transformation

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<sup>175</sup> Spencer: 235.

<sup>176</sup> Feargal Cochrane, *Unionist Politics and the Politics of Unionism since the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997): 134.

requires its restoration.<sup>177</sup> Nonetheless, the government remains complicit in the “conditional loyalty” of the loyalists by continuing to disregard and disrespect their working class constituents. In a particularly egregious example, the DUP recently made a deal with Sinn Féin over the collapsed Presbyterian Mutual Society, which had mostly upper and middle class Protestant investors. In return for Sinn Féin’s support for the bailout, the DUP allegedly agreed to allocate 80% of the Neighborhood Renewal social development funding to deprived *nationalist* areas.<sup>178</sup> This prioritization of upper and middle class interests in the DUP agenda blatantly undermines an improved relationship with the loyalist paramilitaries, which subsequently prolongs the demobilization of the UVF and the UDA.<sup>179</sup> The unionist politicians continue to condemn the loyalists for this intransigence, but offer few incentives to redevelop a contractual relationship.

Still, leading loyalists such as UDA brigadier Jackie McDonald strive to engage with the DUP and encourage its members to reach out to working class communities. McDonald recounts, “I’m saying to Peter Robinson, ‘there’s a gap between unionism and loyalism, and we’re going to have to close that gap... We can’t go up that way, you are going to have to come down and meet us. You can’t come around three weeks before the election and expect us to tell people to vote for you... We’re not doing it anymore.’”<sup>180</sup>

However, the UDA has given the DUP few reasons to believe that they ‘will not do it

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177: Frances Stewart and Graham Brown, “Motivations for Conflict: Groups and Individuals,” in *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World*, ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace [USIP], 2007): 219–241.

178: PUP, “PUP leader Brian Ervine ask for clarification on Sinn Fein-DUP deal.” PUP website. 21 December 2010. <http://progressiveunionistparty.org/2010/12/21/pup-leader-brian-ervine-asks-for-clarification-on-sinn-feindup-deal/>.

179: Cochrane: 134.

180: Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 7 January 2011.

anymore.’ Despite his weathered awareness of the shortcomings of the DUP, McDonald continues to vote for the party, stemming from a fear of being blamed for the hypothetical rise of Sinn Féin. Nonetheless, McDonald admits that unionist unity across class might remain unattainable. He fears that even if the DUP attempts to accommodate working class loyalists, the concessions might inadvertently “disillusion [upper and middle class] people within their own parties.”<sup>181</sup> As McDonald frames the debate, “if we come in the bottom end of Unionism, the people on Malone Road [a wealthy area of South Belfast] are going to fall off the top end. How do you balance that out?”<sup>182</sup> McDonald offers no alternatives and remains opposed to standing working class loyalist candidates.

Despite McDonald’s attitude, some within the UDA and even within McDonald’s own brigade area are beginning to lose patience with the traditional submission to the DUP. According to South Belfast UPRG secretary and Independent Unionist candidate Paul Clissold, his campaign does not undercut the goal of unionist unity, but rather strengthens it in the long term by slowly building mutual respect and engagement with loyalist working class communities. In a recent article, Clissold explains:

Unionist unity is ultimately desirable and can be achieved through an eventual maturing of all strands and elements within the broader unionist family. My particular brand of working class loyalism must be housed in this family before true unity can be achieved. If that means a gradual realignment of the status quo currently monopolizing the market then I welcome it.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> John Howcroft. Interview with the author. North Belfast Community Development. 13 January 2011.

<sup>182</sup> Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 7 January 2011.

<sup>183</sup> Paul Clissold, “As a loyalist, I’m not hung up on a SF first minister,” *News Letter*. 17 August 2010. [http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/local/as\\_a\\_loyalist\\_i\\_m\\_not\\_hung\\_up\\_on\\_a\\_sf\\_first\\_minister\\_1\\_186766](http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/local/as_a_loyalist_i_m_not_hung_up_on_a_sf_first_minister_1_186766) 6.

East Belfast UPRG representative Frankie Gallagher also plans to register a party called Labour in the Community; however, he is doing so secretly and has not yet announced his candidacy.<sup>184</sup> “If they [the DUP] find out what we’re doing,” he claims, “they’ll try to prevent us from standing.”<sup>185</sup> The goals and impact of this new party remain unclear.

In addition to these initiatives, Independent Unionists in North Down are beginning to mobilize under the banner of the “Community Party Northern Ireland” (CPNI).<sup>186</sup> Empowered by last May’s defeat of the “Robinson Dynasty,” the CPNI seeks to offer working class loyalist communities a “strong, clear voice within local government” by taking direct responsibility for the marginalization of its constituents.<sup>187</sup> CPNI candidate Alison Blayney says, “It’s very easy to criticize but we are trying to offer a solution to the problem here—we’re giving people an option at the ballot box.”<sup>188</sup> The proposed solution of the CPNI to the rhetoric of unionist unity is one that controverts the existing assumption that middle and upper class unionists preside over or govern on behalf of their working class constituents. Rather, CPNI’s approach transforms working class community workers and grassroots leaders into political representatives.

The historical inertia of loyalist political parties calls into question the potential of the CPNI and the emerging loyalist political vehicles. Having endured three decades of limited electoral success, the PUP remains the current model for linking paramilitarism

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184: Frankie Gallagher. Skype message to the author. 25 March 2011.

185: Frankie Gallagher. Interview with the author. Charter NI. 6 January 2011.

186: Ibid.

187: Natalie Irvine, “Community workers form political party,” *Belfast Telegraph*. 9 December 2010. <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/community-telegraph/north-down/news/community-workers-form-political-party-15025675.html>.

188: “Party ‘gives voice to working class,’” *News Letter*. 3 December 2010. [http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/local/party\\_gives\\_voice\\_to\\_working\\_class\\_1\\_2360880](http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/local/party_gives_voice_to_working_class_1_2360880).

and politics. While many question the relationship between the two groups, both the PUP and the UVF maintain that they act independently—the PUP is neither the mouthpiece of the UVF, nor does it dictate its actions. Rather, the PUP offers political analysis and advice to the UVF. Despite the autonomy of the two groups, the link continues to impair the credibility of the PUP as a viable political party. The murder of Bobby Moffett in May 2010 was particularly destructive, resulting in the resignation of several executive PUP members, including Dawn Purvis, the party's leader and only representative at Stormont. These events left the party in shambles, and in October 2010, the PUP held a closed meeting with its 60 remaining members to vote on the status of their 'link' with the UVF. Despite the detrimental effects of maintaining the link, only four PUP members voted to sever the historical connection. Instead, many members, including new party leader Brian Ervine, view the link as a responsibility of the PUP and the murder as evidence of the repercussions of drifting from that link, as the party had done under Purvis.<sup>189</sup> Moreover, the link functions as a mechanism for sustaining the relationship of the PUP with the loyalist working class community given the integral role of the UVF in their local communities. It also offers a plausible outlet for the UVF as it continues to push towards civilianization. Ervine suggests that the PUP can eventually make the paramilitaries redundant, whereby political rather than paramilitary engagement becomes the primary vehicle for progressing loyalist working class needs and interests.<sup>190</sup>

The current political landscape offers few clues as to whether the new confidence in loyalist parties and candidates is inflated or misplaced. For the PUP, the party remains plagued by the recent history and perception that it moved too fast for its working class

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<sup>189</sup> Jason Burke, "PUP Candidacy." Email to the author. 30 March 2011.

<sup>190</sup> Brian Ervine.

constituents during the peace process. “We had the hard task of selling the ‘Yes’ agreement in our communities,” Wilson recalls. “Working class loyalists were the ones that were against it.”<sup>191</sup> Wilson claims that the baggage of the peace process continues to inhibit the political prospects of the PUP and that the timing of the party’s involvement in politics was the critical factor in its current trajectory. Wilson hypothesizes:

If the PUP had been formed a year ago and only formed and kicked off with the Billy Hutchinsons and with the machine that we had behind us, we would have at least a dozen MLAs in Northern Ireland. Because simply, we came in at the wrong time. We came in at a hard time, where people couldn’t accept that we’re going to end up sitting down with Sinn Féin and the IRA. A lot of people in our community were still hurt.<sup>192</sup>

Upon reflection, Wilson validates that the resistance of his community to the Agreement was justified, but on different grounds. After years of work in community development, Wilson recognizes that working class loyalists have gained very little from the Agreement and that the DUP has failed to fulfill its promises to help all brands of unionism realize the peace dividends and rather has neglected working class communities. “We seem to have been used as a pawn in a chess game and sacrificed basically for the ends of other politicians,” Wilson says.<sup>193</sup>

The potential to rectify these disconnects between the DUP and the loyalist working class and to boost the political capital of the loyalist parties remains uncertain, and many believe that a viable loyalist political party can never emerge from the UDA or the UVF. As Howcroft says, “the UPRG and PUP were brands born out of conflict, born

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191 :Jim Wilson.

192 :Ibid.

193 :Ibid.

out of necessity, born out of alienation.”<sup>194</sup> Although the UPRG and the PUP have begun to shift towards thinking about real ways to constructively influence their working class loyalist communities, the associations of these groups still personify the history of violence, betrayal, and marginalization. Gallagher contends that until the paramilitaries completely demobilize, loyalist working class communities will not be able to build a viable and sustainable political mechanism, and the DUP will continue to gain acceptance as the political manifestation of “coming out of conflict.”<sup>195</sup>

The continued failure of the DUP and the loyalist paramilitaries to restore the social contract further reinforces a relationship characterized by self-doubt and fatalism. Without a political voice, the loyalist working class remains powerless and beholden to the decisions of the DUP. Conversely, the DUP continues inculcate the loyalist working class communities with rhetoric of unionist unity and to undermine the loyalist paramilitaries by remaining silent on issues such as the double standards set by the HET and the supergrass trials. McDonald suggests the DUP’s failure to defend its working class constituents stems from its belief that “if they make us [the loyalist paramilitaries] respectable, then we’re going to be electable.”<sup>196</sup> While the historical precedent for McDonald’s statement is sound, it implies a continued lethargy of the UDA in taking responsibility to counter the DUP’s propaganda.

In the absence of reliable unionist representatives and “electable” loyalist candidates, some working class loyalists are beginning to build relationships with Sinn Féin, which shares a history of grassroots politics and working class issues. As freezing

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194 †John Howcroft. Interview with the author. North Belfast Community Development. 13 January 2011.

195 †Frankie Gallagher. Interview with the author. Charter NI. 6 January 2011.

196 †Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 7 January 2011.



temperatures caused pipes to burst across Belfast in late December 2010, working class residents were particularly hard hit by the ensuing water crisis, but their unionist politicians remained largely aloof. One UVF member explained that a friend living on the Shankill who suffers from mental illness and acute asthma called numerous unionist politicians to fix her pipes, but to no avail. Not until the UVF man contacted friends in Sinn Féin was the problem resolved.<sup>197</sup> Although some within the community fear that Sinn Féin is exploiting the enduring chasm between working class loyalism and the DUP, other working class loyalists are beginning to resist the DUP's rhetoric of unionist unity and to accept the support of Sinn Féin despite its divergent political platform. Young PUP candidate Jason Burke encapsulates this relationship and his personal call to politics in the funeral of David Ervine on the ultra-loyalist Newtownards Road in East Belfast:

Gerry Adams and Alex Maskey [senior Sinn Féin politicians] walked past the crowds of mourners to enter the church...you could have heard a pin drop. There was no animosity, just silence and a strange feeling in the air. When Peter Robinson arrived and walked the same stretch of road, he was heckled and jeered by the loyalist people.<sup>198</sup>

McDonald claims that some UDA members on the Shankill are beginning to vote for Sinn Féin due to growing feeling of neglect by and tension with their own politicians.<sup>199</sup> Another UVF member confirms that some of his friends have been coopted to work with Sinn Féin MLAs.<sup>200</sup> In a recent article, Clissold wrote, "The alarm bells should be ringing for the UUP and the DUP. It's an indictment of their inverted snobbery that in

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<sup>197</sup> Interview with UVF member. Belfast. 13 January 2011.

<sup>198</sup> Burke, "PUP Candidacy." Email to the author. 23 March 2011.

<sup>199</sup> Sam McBride, "Loyalist working class 'voting SF,'" *News Letter*. 14 January 2011. <http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/Loyalists-voting-for-Sinn-Fein.6690225.jp>

<sup>200</sup> Interview with UVF member. Belfast. 13 January 2011.

working class areas some, a minority, feel the need to vote for other candidates not necessarily from their political ideology. That should worry them.”<sup>201</sup>

### *Taking Responsibility for Relationships*

Over the past few years, incidents such as the Moffett murder and the water crisis have jolted the UVF and the UDA into recognizing the necessity of restructuring relationships with their communities and with their political representatives. An evaluation of the three indicators of *behaving correctly*, *being accountable*, and *acting independently* demonstrates that despite this growing awareness, the loyalists remain limited in the extent to which they are taking responsibility for conflict transformation. Moreover, this conclusion is inconsistent across the two organizations and in relation to the people versus the politicians.

Both the UVF and the UDA largely fail to fulfill the indicator of *behaving correctly*. By law, the two loyalist paramilitary groups remain proscribed and membership in the organizations remains illegal. Nonetheless, a process of DDR—which would dissolve the organizations, the criminal financing structures that sustain them, and the mechanisms of influencing their communities—remains largely stagnant. Given the end of the Troubles and the purported elimination of the threat to the Union, the loyalist paramilitaries retain little justification preserving the organizations. In accordance with this shift to a post-conflict society, the UVF and the UDA have largely ceased sectarian attacks and feuding between the organizations; however, the recent paramilitary-style murder of former UVF man Bobby Moffett demonstrates a continued reliance of

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<sup>201</sup> McBride.

violence. Although the IMC did not deem the attack a breach of the 1994 ceasefire, it clearly represents unlawful conduct and a defiance of social standards. In contrast, the blowback from the incident caused the organization to return to a more rigorous path of civilianization, which remains a centerpiece of the relationship between the paramilitaries and their communities and an example of ethical behavior following the precepts of the Good Friday Agreement. Nonetheless, the lack of concrete progress to this point fails to follow through on the UVF promises in 2007 and 2010 to civilianize. For the UDA, success in behaving correctly remains uneven across brigade areas and fragmented between the leadership and the membership, as has been discussed in the previous IMC reports. While the UDA has discussed demobilization projects such as the UDU, these initiatives remain largely unfulfilled. Although the extent of criminality within the two loyalist organizations remains unsubstantiated, the perpetuation of criminality—even for personal rather than organizational profiteering—remains a problem of unlawful conduct.

Both organizations also largely fail to fulfill the indicator of *being accountable*. Within the UVF, some members continue to deny any culpability for the murder of Bobby Moffett. Moreover, the incident demonstrated a breakdown in the system of internal checks and safeguards that could have prevented the attack. The recent invitation of external advisors to advise and oversee the UVF civilianization indicates a positive step in building external checks; however, the overall process remains only limitedly transparent to the public. Within the UDA, the leadership continues to avoid blame for its internal criminality, as each brigadier claims to have no knowledge of criminality within his own area, but suggests a likelihood of incidents in others'. Given the irregularity of meetings as a unified organization and the primary loyalty of the

leadership to their distinctive communities, internal cohesion within the UDA remains limited and accountability across the various brigade areas remains largely absent.

The loyalist argument for building internal social cohesion obscures a decisive evaluation of whether or not the loyalist paramilitaries are being accountable for local criminality. While internal social cohesion impedes DDR in the short-term, the loyalists argue that it will be more effective in the long-run by ensuring the compliance of their diehards and criminal elements. Although the leaderships of both the UVF and the UDA appear firmly committed to the termination of internal criminal activity, it is yet unclear whether a concerted strategy of DDR, in lieu of organic dissolution, can generate comprehensive change. Moreover, the loss of coercive influence as a credible means of “internal housekeeping” has made it more difficult for the loyalists to demand accountability from its criminal members. The coordination of the UVF and UDA leadership with the PSNI demonstrates an attempt to shift accountability from the paramilitaries to formal mechanisms of law and order; however, the persistence of criminal and anti-social behavior demonstrates that current attempts remain insufficient. Relatedly, many loyalists contend that the persistence of paramilitary-style justice strives to defend local communities rather than to prey on them. Nonetheless, it remains unclear to what extent this argument is merely an excuse for ongoing criminality. These debates are intrinsic to the proposed goals of the loyalists to meet the needs and interest of working class loyalist communities, especially in terms of local means of justice.

Politically, the increasing disaffection with unionist politicians is contributing to a new trend of loyalist working class leaders who are willing to accept accountability for fulfilling the needs of their communities. In particular, the emergence of new candidates running as Independents, renewing the PUP, developing the CPNI, and limitedly relying

on Sinn Féin inherently contributes to the fulfillment of the indicator of being accountable, but will remain untested unless these candidates succeed at the upcoming election. While many perceive the decision of the PUP to maintain the link with the UVF as a critical flaw in this new trend of loyalist political accountability, the PUP believes that the link marks the ultimate political sacrifice in order to take responsibility for the civilianization of the UVF and for the interests of its working class loyalist communities. This argument bears fruit only as long as the UVF remains on the path of civilianization.

Lastly, the loyalist paramilitaries have been limitedly successful in fulfilling the indicator of *acting independently*. Notably, the loyalist attempts at DDR continue to suffer from the lack of a state-sponsored process and the inability of the organizations to galvanize critical mass in response to the stated interests of the loyalist working class communities for the UVF and the UDA to disband. With respect to autonomy of action, the renewed commitment of the UVF to self-guided civilianization and the limited attempt of the UDA to establish the UDU are positive indicators; however, the persistent demands of the IICD with respect to disarmament and the reported “money for guns” proposal of the UDA demonstrate a historical failure of autonomous action. With respect to acting expeditiously, both organizations have failed to rapidly enact the peace process. With the removal of the sectarian threat of the PIRA in 2005, the loyalist paramilitaries lost the most cogent justification for resisting a parallel process of DDR, but continue to suffer from commitment problems. Despite the eventual completion of disarmament and of standing down the UFF and the youth wings of the UVF and the UDA, the slow pace of these initiatives has demonstrated a failure to fulfill the indicator of acting independently.

While the levels of political mobilization within the UVF and the UDA remain varied, the independent activities under the banners of the PUP, CPNI, and Independent Unionists are critical new developments demonstrating independent action. These new political configurations are host to individuals acting on principle rather than in accordance with DUP rhetoric and calls for unionist unity. These new loyalist political actors are beginning to develop their own platforms and policies to meet the needs of working class loyalist communities. Moreover, regardless of the extent to which loyalist leaders, such as McDonald, remain convinced of the potential of unionist unity to restore the social contract between loyalists and their political representatives, the loyalist leadership of both the UVF and the UDA is generally becoming less tolerant of neglect and manipulation and more apt to demand the attention of unionist politicians.

Overall, the loyalists are only limitedly behaving correctly, being accountable, and acting independently, demonstrating that the extent to which the UVF and the UDA are taking responsibility for restructuring relationships remains moderate. While the UVF plans for civilianization are a positive development in the goal of restructuring relationships with the grassroots loyalist working class communities, the UDA process continues to stagnate. The persistence of criminality also continues to hold the process of DDR hostage, despite loyalist claims to the contrary. Most significantly, the relationship of the paramilitaries and the politicians has undergone the greatest awakening, and while not yet accepted by the entirety of the UVF or the UDA, the PUP and the CPNI have great potential to significantly restructure the status quo.

### ***Building Capacity***

Over the past decades, the capacity for conflict transformation within the UVF, the UDA, and their associated communities has largely stagnated. Many loyalist working class areas continue to suffer from multiple deprivations including poverty, unemployment, poor housing and education, mental health issues, drug problems, crime, and antisocial behavior. While many believed that the Good Friday Agreement would facilitate regeneration at a grassroots level, loyalist working class communities remain largely unaffected by the peace dividends. These communities are just beginning to learn self-reliance, to implement community development projects, and to bolster their profiles individually and collectively. Despite obstacles both internal and external to the loyalist paramilitary organizations, they continue to contribute to capacity building through local initiatives, educational aspirations, and civic engagement on behalf of working class loyalist communities.

### *Contributing to Local Initiatives*

In the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement, the loyalist paramilitaries and their working class communities believed they were promised certain benefits. The UVF and UDA politically-motivated prisoners expected early release from prison and subsequent life opportunities and renewed family life. Their communities believed that the new Stormont government would invest politically and financially in local community development. The Northern Ireland Office fulfilled its promise with respect to the implementation of an early release scheme; however, despite reassurances from the PUP and the UDP that grassroots needs would eventually be fulfilled, the outcomes from the Good Friday Agreement remain limited. What little financial investment has been

allotted to working class loyalist communities has failed to address their highest priorities and most serious needs, demonstrating the DUP's continued misunderstanding of their working class constituents.<sup>202</sup>

The responsibility of capacity building has instead fallen to community workers and paramilitary members. With the formal end of the Troubles, ex-prisoner associations—most notably, EPIC, which serves UVF ex-prisoners and Charter Northern Ireland, which serves UDA ex-prisoners—emerged to respond to the severe mental health issues and lack of transferable skills of former loyalist politically-motivated prisoners. In response to these needs, ex-prisoner groups offered support services such as counseling, adult education opportunities, vocational training, and welfare rights advice to loyalist prisoners.<sup>203</sup> Although the former prisoners represented a critical 'at risk' population, they also offered an essential resource for executing further community work.<sup>204</sup> These organizations, therefore, began to harness the inherent social capital of ex-prisoners by involving former prisoners in a range of community development initiatives, such as monitoring interfaces, intervening in youth disputes, and undertaking community work regarding housing, health, parading, policing, and anti-sectarianism. Former loyalist politically-motivated prisoners have become especially vital to the promotion of single-identity work within youth populations. As McDonald describes it, "The furthest thing from my mind is violence...I'll be changing babies' nappies next."<sup>205</sup> EPIC, Charter, and

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<sup>202</sup> John Kelly, "Beyond the Mask: An Imperfect Peace." Fingerprint Learning. North Down Community Forum. January 2011.

<sup>203</sup> For more information, see <http://www.charterni.com>.

<sup>204</sup> Ruth Jamieson, Peter Shirlow, and Adrian Grounds, "Ageing and Social Exclusion Among Former Politically Motivated Prisoners in Northern Ireland." Changing Ageing Partnership. (2010).

<sup>205</sup> Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 7 January 2011.



other ex-prisoner associations continue such work, albeit with extremely limited resources. Of the £950 million in European Peace funding from 1995-2003, only 1% went to 61 former prisoner groups and an additional 29 affiliated projects.<sup>206</sup>

In addition to financial limitations, the community work of ex-prisoners also suffers from the statutory limits and psychological barriers placed on individuals with criminal records. Therefore, the branding of “ex-prisoner” continues to damage the prospects and development of working class loyalist communities even if ex-prisoners have denounced paramilitarism and criminality. Many ex-prisoners find it incredibly challenging to lease a car, rent a home, obtain welfare benefits, and, in particular, secure a job.<sup>207</sup> The failure to obtain these assets influences not only ex-prisoners, but also family members, whose own activities remains limited. These serious second order effects cripple broader community functions.

The independent advocacy of groups such as EPIC has made small gains in recent years to enable a broader spectrum of resources and possible employment opportunities to enable former prisoners to contribute to their communities. Whereas ex-prisoners have formerly been limited to menial jobs such as taxi driving and community-based construction work, opportunities have become available in the security industry since an amendment to the Security Industry Act in 2009.<sup>208</sup> The amendment to the legislation includes considerations that “conflict-related convictions” will not necessarily exclude

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206 Peter Shirlow and Kieran McEvoy, *Beyond the Wire: Former Prisoners and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland* (London: Pluto Press, 2008): 53.

207 “Paramilitary ex-prisoners struggle to find employment and a normal life,” *Irish Times*. 8 August 2000. <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/features/2000/0805/00080500048.html>.

208 “Draft Private Security Industry Act 2001 (Amendment).” Order 2009. Northern Ireland Assembly. 1 June 2009. [http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/adhocs/2007mandate/private\\_security/moe/2008/090601.htm](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/adhocs/2007mandate/private_security/moe/2008/090601.htm).

former politically-motivated prisoners from obtaining a license for a position as a security guard for civilian purposes.<sup>209</sup> Even this small shift represents a critical step to making security sector reform more inclusive of former paramilitaries. Nonetheless, community work remains one of the most accessible alternatives to criminality.

One of the most successful local initiatives has been Northern Ireland Alternatives, a restorative justice group started by the UVF to stem the tide of paramilitary punishment beatings in response to anti-social behavior. Despite the persistence of paramilitary justice, Alternatives has augmented the capacity of loyalist communities to cope with issues of low level crime and anti-social behavior given the failure of the formal criminal justice system to effectively respond.<sup>210</sup> While the PSNI tends to prioritize larger scale crime and while the paramilitaries have traditionally administered violent forms of justice, Alternatives promotes the convening of perpetrator and victim to address both the explicit offense as well as the root causes of community issues and to embed a value of local accountability. Moreover, the Pupils and Community Together (PACT) program has sought to extend the values and practice of restorative justice to youth and school environments.<sup>211</sup>

The UDA has also engaged in significant local capacity building initiatives; however, their broader attempts at mobilizing community development have suffered from issues of legitimacy and funding. Beginning in 2005, the UDA began a program called “Loyalism in Transition,” which provided a forum for the rank-and-file membership of the UDA to engage in the conversation on decommissioning and on the

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209 Ibid.

210 Northern Ireland – Alternatives. <http://www.ni-alternatives.co.uk>.

211 Ibid.

transformations in loyalism more broadly.<sup>212</sup> In October 2006, as a direct outcome of “Loyalism in Transition,” the Conflict Transformation Initiative (CTI) formed to cope with the issues voiced by the participating UDA rank-and-file members. The program sought to establish community outreach and development projects for the renewal of “hard-to-reach loyalist communities,” which experienced the most crippling set of structural and psychological deprivations.<sup>213</sup> To achieve this goals, CTI endorsed a capacity building approach to—among other objectives—“equip people with the skills and knowledge to bring about an end to all paramilitary activities; to equip people with the skills and knowledge to reduce crime and criminality in communities”.<sup>214</sup>

During the three years of the program, CTI collaborated with over 100 community groups and established dialogue with statutory agencies, churches, community representatives, republicans, and young people to create invaluable networks and partnerships. The UDA-UPRG leadership and membership have been instrumental in executing both the affiliated and independent community development projects. Nonetheless, in 2007 former Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie attempted to withdraw government funding for CTI by instituting a 60-day deadline for the decommissioning of the UDA or else the program would lose its funding. A court case thwarted Ritchie’s endeavor, but the situation demonstrated the continued barriers to loyalist paramilitary attempts to participate in community development.

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212: Michael Hall ed, “Loyalism in Transition 1: A New Reality?” Island Pamphlets No. 79. Belfast: Regency Press, 2006.

213: Jane Turnbull, “Conflict Transformation Initiative Audit/Evaluation Report.” Education and Development. June 2009.

214: Ibid.

The economic downturn has further exacerbated the issue of government disinterest in working class loyalist communities. Howcroft asserts that these communities will simply “depend even more on the community and voluntary sectors for service delivery” where the state leaves a vacuum.<sup>215</sup> However, as local groups develop their capacity to meet local needs, the state is becoming increasingly complacent and continues to cede responsibility for service provision to working class loyalist communities. Howcroft claims that “working class communities are used to austerity;” however, the most recent financial challenges have made funding local initiatives particularly difficult.

Moreover, loyalist community groups suffer from an underdevelopment of grant writing expertise, which would enable them to secure such funding. Grant proposals from loyalist community groups tend to recognize the needs and the insufficient resources, but fail to detail implementation and to take responsibility for doing so.<sup>216</sup> Within this trend, only one of the recent UDA-associated proposals to the Northern Ireland Committee on Protection acknowledged responsibility for local problems and for a cooperative solution. In 2010, the UDA-associated group North Belfast Community Development & Transition Group wrote, “the opportunities for loyalist working class areas to prosper are plentiful,” and proposed joint responsibility through “partnerships between the organization, community, voluntary organizations, and statutory agencies [that represent] the best infrastructure and approach to affect best delivery on the ground.”<sup>217</sup> The proposal was awarded funding to promote local drugs awareness

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215 <sup>3</sup>John Howcroft. Interview with the author. North Belfast Community Development. 13 January 2011.

216 <sup>3</sup>Review of a series of UDA-associated grant proposals to NICOP in 2010.

217 <sup>3</sup>“North Belfast Community Development & Transition Group.” Grant proposal to NICOP. 2010.

programming in coordination with the Forum for Action on Substance Abuse. With the joint leadership of the UVF's spokesman—and former PUP MLA—Billy Hutchinson and the UDA's North Belfast brigadier John Bunting, the North Belfast initiatives have gained widespread praise throughout and beyond their working class communities. They reflect a keen awareness of the real deprivations, opportunities for change, and practical obstacles to implementation. Their capacity building and community relations program, LEAD (leadership, education, and development) employs a program of theoretical, practical, and applied learning to foster new leadership.<sup>218</sup> This model of capacity building has the potential to offer transferable skill sets that enable community members to take responsibility for further development.

### *Creating a Protestant Education Ethic*

Without a new generation of leaders, conflict transformation within loyalist working class communities will remain severely stunted in the new post-conflict environment. As Howcroft frames the debate,

We're still in a battlefield, but it's a whole new battlefield, it's a completely new concept. And for that new battle you need not just new tools, but a whole bloody new toolbox for it. It's about trying to create that successional leadership, but also that distributional leadership within the community.<sup>219</sup>

Within working class loyalist communities, the potential of new leadership is intrinsically tied to the abysmal state of education among young people. A recent report by East Belfast MLA and former PUP leader Dawn Purvis highlights that 75% of “Lower Than

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218 North Belfast Community Development & Transition Group. <http://nbcdtg.com>.

219 John Howcroft. Interview with the author. North Belfast Community Development. 13 January 2011.

Expected” schools are in Protestant areas.<sup>220</sup> The products of these schools are underachieving Protestant students, who underperform in relation to their Catholic counterparts in almost every metric. For Protestant students eligible for the Free School Meals program—which is used as an indicator of social deprivation—only 18.8% leave school achieving at least five General Certificates of Secondary Education at grades A\*-C, compared with 29.4% of their Catholic peers.<sup>221</sup> A socially disadvantaged student in a Protestant school has a 10% chance of attending university, compared to 20% for a Catholic student.<sup>222</sup> Moreover, limited employment opportunities have left 20% of all 18-24 year olds unemployed,<sup>223</sup> representing a cost to the Northern Ireland economy of £4.5 million per week in Jobseeker’s Allowance.<sup>224</sup>

Among the myriad of community deprivations, Howcroft calls the dismal state of education in loyalist working class communities an “aspirational poverty,” whereby young people maintain low expectations due to their family histories, current communities, and lack of opportunities for the future. Howcroft suggests that to raise expectations, young people need access to “holistic education” to boost the educational attainment in a school setting, but also in the home and the community.<sup>225</sup> Within the

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220<sup>1</sup> Dawn Purvis, “Educational Underachievement and the Protestant Working Class: A Summary of Research, for Consultation.” Working Group on Educational Underachievement and the Protestant Working Class. (December 2010). <http://www.atl.org.uk/Images/EDPWC%20Research%20Summary%20Dec10.pdf>.

221<sup>1</sup> “Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers 2008/09.” Department of Education Northern Ireland. 27 May 2010. <http://www.deni.gov.uk/sls0809.pdf>.

222<sup>1</sup> Dawn Purvis, “Educational Underachievement.”

223<sup>1</sup> “Monthly Labour Market Report.” Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Investment. January 2011.

224<sup>1</sup> “The Cost of Exclusion: Counting the Cost of Youth Disadvantage in the UK.” The Prince’s Trust. (November 2010).

225<sup>1</sup> John Howcroft. Interview with the author. North Belfast Community Development. 13 January 2011.

institutionalized education system, the 11+ examination, which serves as a selection mechanism for either secondary school or more academically-oriented grammar school, remains a centerpiece of the debate. As Burke describes the process, “you either ‘succeeded’ or ‘failed’ in terms of the transfer process to senior school, leaving many caught in a vicious cycle of discouragement, poor confidence, bad results, and then severe lack of career prospects thereafter.”<sup>226</sup> Nonetheless, unionist politicians have traditionally defended the exam, while republicans have sought to abolish it. In 2008, Sinn Féin Education Minister Catriona Ruane succeeded at eliminating the exam through the legislative process; however, no viable alternatives have been introduced in practice, and schools continue to use the 11+ exam system with working class students continuing to suffer the consequences. Ruane reported that in 2009, less than 10% of students from the Shankill passed the 11+ exam.<sup>227</sup> Leading loyalists report that last year, only one student passed. While the 11+ remains in place, it is a critical barrier to personal and community advancement and conflict transformation in working class loyalist communities.

As per Howcroft’s mention of holistic education, the culture of education in loyalist working class communities also contributes to underachievement. These communities traditionally worked in the industrial sector, for which learning the trade was the primary educational requirement. Therefore, schooling was under-prioritized and left many working class loyalists without alternatives during deindustrialization and with

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<sup>226</sup> Burke. “PUP Candidacy.” Email to the author. 23 March 2011.

<sup>227</sup> “Ruane: 90% in Shankill not bound for grammars.” *Belfast Telegraph*. 28 March 2009. <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/ruane-90-in-shankill-not-bound-for-grammars-14247601.html>.

a strong sense of loss and impaired self-worth.<sup>228</sup> During the Troubles, many young men turned further from education and toward paramilitarism, whereby Spence University was a singular opportunity for learning. Many ex-prisoners and paramilitaries have received higher qualifications and degrees only in later life.

For those growing up since the Good Friday Agreement, working class loyalist communities largely still fail to instill in their young people the value of education. Given the absence of male mentors both in school settings and at home, young men are particularly susceptible to the tradition of educational disengagement.<sup>229</sup> Many continue to struggle with an identity that is defined neither by paramilitary status nor intellectual excellence, and tend to glorify the paramilitary experiences of their male role models. McDonald strives to dispute this standard, saying, “You should have aspirations to be a young politician, not a young paramilitary;” however, those young men who do seek a good education are frequently ostracized by their peers.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, when seeking employment the sons and daughters of former paramilitaries often experience stigmatization built on the legacy of their families’ involvement in violent conflict. In response, many young people are turning to low-level criminal and anti-social behavior. Howcroft declares, “We can’t allow this to be the inheritance of the next generation.” Rather, he suggests a need to establish a “Protestant education ethic” to embed in the culture of working class loyalist communities for the future.<sup>231</sup>

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228<sup>1</sup> Dawn Purvis, “Educational Underachievement and the Protestant Working Class: A Call to Action.” Working Group on Educational Underachievement and the Protestant Working Class. (March 2011).

229<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

230<sup>1</sup> Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 7 January 2011.

231<sup>1</sup> John Howcroft. Interview with the author. North Belfast Community Development. 13 January 2011.



Having experienced the personal plight of reintegrating without sufficient skills and their communities' difficulty of developing without political capacity, leaders within the PUP, the UVF, and the UDA have begun to spearhead efforts to build a new value of education. In November 2010, Queen's University hosted a conference "Ulster Loyalism: Past, Present, and Future," which convened academics, community stakeholders, and leading loyalists to participate in debate. Despite living in South Belfast his entire life, UDA brigadier Jackie McDonald had never stepped foot on the Queen's campus until that conference. He reminisces, "Queen's University to a working class person on Sandy Row or Taughmonagh or Finaghy...it's like Buckingham Palace... because it's just this mirage, this myth, you know, we would never be there."<sup>232</sup> He hopes to prevent the transmission of this psychology to working class loyalist youth today. Therefore, McDonald has been working with Queen's to offer history classes accessible to loyalist students who otherwise might not have the opportunity to experience an institution of higher education. He believes that if working class loyalist youth witness the environment of Queen's from the inside, they would see that "this is not beyond me."<sup>233</sup> Unfortunately, the few working class loyalists who excel in the education system tend to leave their communities, contributing to a crippling brain drain with 34% of Protestants as compared with 23% of Roman Catholics leaving Northern Ireland for educational opportunities and evidence likely supporting similar rates of non-return.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 7 January 2011.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ronald McQuaid and Emma Hollywood. "Educational Migration and Non-Return in Northern Ireland." Employment Research Institute. Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. May 2008.

Despite this continued erosion of local human resources, Brian Ervine suggests that loyalist working class communities represent a wealth of untapped potential that he hopes to harness for educational programming. In the coming months, Ervine hopes to mobilize former teachers, professionals, even laborers for training in literacy outreach to both young people and adults. Building on the model of the Shannon Trust's Toe by Toe initiative, which employed politically-motivated prisoners to mentor their peers, the program would offer a low-cost community alternative to large-scale institutional change. Ervine's philosophy is "start from what you have, and what you've got, and not relying on anybody else."<sup>235</sup> A pilot of the program is currently underway in West Belfast. The UDA is also working with Stranmillis College University, which specializes in teacher education, and hoping to pair young teachers with working class loyalist students for afterschool help.

The most organized and well-resourced of these educational initiatives is the "From Prison to Peace" school curriculum, established with the help of Queen's University professor Lesley McEvoy and the endorsement of Education Minister Ruane. The program is one element of a much broader conflict transformation program that convenes republican and loyalist paramilitaries and former politically-motivated prisoners, with particularly robust involvement from the UDA, to promote peacebuilding, social change, and youth development and citizenship.<sup>236</sup> Paramilitary leaders engage teenagers in community work, lead educational site visits, and host lectures to offer young people insight into "living history from the people who made it."<sup>237</sup> One of the

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<sup>235</sup> Brian Ervine. Interview with the author. PUP Office. 11 January 2011.

<sup>236</sup> "From Prison to Peace—Frequently Asked Questions." *Steps: From Prison to Peace*, no 2. (2010): 2.

<sup>237</sup> Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 7 January 2011.

concrete outcomes of the program thus far is its learning pack for schools, which serves as a resource for teachers to introduce students to the experiences of the former politically-motivated prisoners during and since the Troubles. Through meetings between teachers and the former prisoners involved with the program, this material is currently being integrated into school curricula to expose young people to the realities of conflict, to deglamorize paramilitarism, to encourage education, and to stimulate discussion about how to positively contribute to Northern Irish society. The training of teachers and paramilitaries for direct engagement with each other and the subsequent opportunity for interface and dialogue builds critical capacity to facilitate and share each individual's contributions to conflict transformation.<sup>238</sup>

According to many leading loyalists, there is already a growing interest among young people in community development and capacity building, demonstrating that a Protestant ethic of education—whether formal or informal—is beginning to take root. Although paramilitary recruitment allegedly ended for both the UVF and the UDA in 2007, young people are continuing to identify themselves to the organizations with an interest in honing their skills to foster the potential of their communities. This has become a particularly important outlet for young women leaders in conflict transformation, given that they did not have an opportunity to advocate on behalf of their communities through paramilitarism. The leadership of the UVF and the UDA is promoting these young people by helping them map out a career path—finding coursework for them to acquire beginning qualifications, finding placement for them in youth clubs, and coordinating with Northern Ireland's two universities to give them

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<sup>238</sup> Lesley McEvoy, "From Prison to Peace Aims and Protocols." Draft. 19 March 2011.

access to degree programs. “All you are is a facilitator of a process for them,” Howcroft maintains.<sup>239</sup> According to many leading loyalists, this localized, practical, and experiential education is dramatically contributing to self-empowerment in a way that a school education cannot. By teaching young people that they are the instruments of capacity building and reconstruction of the self-respect and self-confidence of their communities, this process is nurturing a nascent working class loyalist culture of education whereby young people can begin to take responsibility for conflict transformation.

### *Fostering Civic Engagement*

In the absence of basic educational achievement, political education is particularly lacking in working class loyalist communities. While the established parties in Stormont send their young people to mock chamber debates and the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly, the loyalists struggle to gain representation at these events due to their lack of political clout. While the major parties each has its own youth club to encourage participation among new generations of prospective politicians, these organizations tend to revolve around universities, which remain largely out of reach of working class loyalist students. While middle class residents dominate local boards and organizations, loyalist working class residents claim that their applications are perpetually rejected. While the DUP and UUP have participated in political workshops and hire political advisers, the

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<sup>239</sup> John Howcroft. Interview with the author. North Belfast Community Development. 13 January 2011.

PUP does not have resources to fund comparable services for political development.

These obstacles and limitations at all levels of civic engagement have severely damaged the prospects of working class loyalist involvement. However, initiatives are beginning to take root to build the capacity of young people, community members, and party politics for more robust civic engagement. In particular, the growing involvement of young people and loyalist paramilitary leadership in community development work is increasingly proving itself a viable pathway into politics.

With the end of paramilitary recruitment, community development is becoming the primary mechanism for sparking the interest of young people in contributing not only to local initiatives, but also to civic engagement, as a means for identifying potential future political leaders and nurturing their nascent skills. In addition to promoting career development and capacity building, politicians and party members are therefore increasingly developing programs for political mentorship. Although this process remains extremely limited, there are inspiring precedents demonstrating its success. Perhaps most notable is the mentorship by Gusty Spence and David Ervine of former PUP leader, Dawn Purvis. Before her introduction to the PUP in 1994, Purvis epitomized Belfast loyalist working class women. Her education was typical of her community, having failed the 11+ examination and dropping out of school at sixteen with few qualifications. She worked various jobs throughout her community, but left to take care of her two sons. She was running a parent-toddler group and an after school club when a friend linked to the UVF approached her about joining the PUP. Although she was never involved with paramilitarism, she was compelled to join because the PUP was genuinely representative of working class loyalist communities and had “seen Northern Ireland the

way it was, as a bloody awful place.”<sup>240</sup> She joined on three conditions, “1) that he [presumably Spence] didn’t elect me to any position within the party, 2) that he didn’t put my name on any piece of paper that was either published by the party or circulated by the party, and 3) that I was very happy to clean the office and make the tea.”<sup>241</sup> With the mentorship and encouragement of Spence and Ervine none of these conditions held, and Purvis gained an increasingly strong profile within both the PUP and the wider community. As exhibited in countless interviews and statements to the press, she has evolved into a confident, humble, progressive, and highly professional politician, keenly aware of the issues, the necessary steps for change, and the obstacles to success. Despite her working class upbringing, she exhibits a political savvy that others within the PUP seem to lack. Although many within the UVF community resent her decision to resign in the aftermath of the Moffett murder, the overall impression of Purvis is of her sincerity in working for her community.<sup>242</sup> Purvis’ profound personal transformation from working class woman into PUP leader demonstrates the power of civic engagement as a process of conflict transformation.

Although the PUP failed to build a successional leadership that could survive the trauma dealt by the Moffett murder, current PUP leader Brian Ervine claims that the involvement and mentorship of young people is restarting across a range of capacities. According to Ervine, four “young guns” have joined the party to support its renaissance.<sup>243</sup> Most notable is Jason Burke, who is running as a candidate for the

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240 <sup>1</sup>Dawn Purvis. Interview with the author. Stormont. 11 January 2011.

241 <sup>1</sup>Ibid.

242 <sup>1</sup>Interview with senior UVF member. Belfast. 10 January 2011.

243 <sup>1</sup>Brian Ervine.

Castlereagh Council. Born and raised in Castlereagh and a graduate of Queen's University, Burke has defied the Protestant brain drain and shows nascent interest in the political process. Burke describes his time at Queen's as a transformative one. "I found myself agreeing with a lot of the things Sinn Féin was saying," he reflects. Burke says these realizations were strange and confusing, but also liberating as he came to appreciate the Troubles as a conflict not about religion, but about class.<sup>244</sup> He subsequently joined the PUP in 2009, and when the party identified him as a potential candidate for the upcoming elections, he accepted because "it was clear that nobody else was up for the task."<sup>245</sup> He maintains that he has no aspirations for a career in politics, but feels a deep sense of responsibility towards his community to challenge "the old middle class dinosaurs involved in a corrupt local council" in Castlereagh.<sup>246</sup> Burke's profile on the PUP website is the only one—among those of his seven older colleagues also running—to detail *how* he plans to achieve this goal and improve the lives of his community.<sup>247</sup> The traditional platform of the PUP revolved around the twin-track agenda of 1) paramilitary transformation by "removing any rationale for continued violence," and 2) community transformation by curtailing the neglect and deprivation of working class loyalist communities; however, Purvis contends that the ongoing link between the PUP and the UVF is preventing the party's prioritization of the latter goal.<sup>248</sup> Nonetheless, Burke's stated political objectives reveal his personal commitment community

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244: Jason Burke, "PUP Candidacy." Email to the author. 23 March 2011.

245: Ibid.

246: Ibid.

247: "Jason Burke." Progressive Unionist Party website.  
<http://progressiveunionistparty.org/profiles/candidates/jason-burke/>.

248: Dawn Purvis. Interview with the author. Stormont. 11 January 2011.

transformation and the value added of young membership in aspiring to that goal. Specifically, Burke plans to resurrect the party's youth wing Progressive Youth to continue to build the capacity of the PUP to balance its twin-track agenda and contribute to community confidence.<sup>249</sup>

The CPNI is also nurturing a young new candidate in 21-year-old Jamie Bryson. Although Bryson places little value on formal education and believes the system has failed him, he has gained a 'holistic education' through his involvement in community development work since 2007.<sup>250</sup> Mentor and fellow CPNI candidate Mark Gordon claims that Bryson has acquired a practical education from working closely with elected officials on community initiatives and observing how they interact with their constituents. Gordon has also sought to offer Bryson opportunities for public speaking and guidance to "hone his ambitions."<sup>251</sup> Bryson has also researched Barack Obama's 2008 United States presidential campaign, which is evident in CPNI's extensive use of social media.<sup>252</sup> Moreover, Bryson's candidacy has sparked the interest of dozens of other young people in North Down, and Gordon claims that a recent voter registration event saw the attendance of over 110 young people, which according to Gordon is unprecedented.<sup>253</sup>

Independent West Belfast City Councillor Frank McCoubrey—formerly a prominent UPRG member—also identifies mentorship as a useful tool in building youth political capacity. He claims that, if reelected in May, he will identify a young person on

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<sup>249</sup> Jason Burke, "PUP Candidacy." Email to the author. 30 March 2011.

<sup>250</sup> Jamie Bryson, "CPNI Candidacy." Facebook message to the author. 29 March 2011.

<sup>251</sup> Mark Gordon, "CPNI." Email to the author. 31 March 2011.

<sup>252</sup> Bryson, "CPNI Candidacy." Facebook message to the author. 29 March 2011.

<sup>253</sup> Gordon, "CPNI." Email to the author. 31 March 2011.



the Shankill to shadow him—although he has not yet identified a candidate. He hopes in doing so to pave the road for future aspiring politicians. “When I wanted to get involved in politics, I had to find my way in this big wilderness on my own. Every door was closed in my face.”<sup>254</sup> Despite his label as an Independent, McCoubrey also promotes engagement with the established Unionist parties, and there has been speculation that he will run as a UUP councillor in the upcoming election.<sup>255</sup> “If we want to change our politics, we have to get people from grassroots to be involved at the grassroots of those bigger parties to feed up the problems within our communities so it gets to the leadership.”<sup>256</sup> Although McCoubrey acknowledges the responsibility of working class communities, his perspective aligns more closely with the ‘unionist unity’ views of McDonald, who contends that the DUP and the UUP should help inspire civic engagement in loyalist working class communities by speaking at schools and youth clubs.<sup>257</sup>

Others harshly condemn such a strategy, claiming the sanctity of upholding the loyalist banner. A recent incident with Castlereagh Councillor Sharon Skillen has stirred these judgments and individual resentments. Skillen initially became politically engaged in 2007 when Frankie Gallagher, then director of the CTI program, employed the 21-year-old as a Regional Development Officer for CTI.<sup>258</sup> She demonstrated a keen interest

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254 Frank McCoubrey. Interview with the author. Greater Shankill Community Council. 11 January 2011.

255 UUP supporter, Comment on blog post “Ex-UVF Prisoner Joins DUP.” Slugger O’Toole. 7 December 2010. <http://sluggerotoole.com/2010/12/07/ex-uvf-prisoner-joins-dup/>.

256 Frank McCoubrey.

257 Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 7 January 2011.

258 “Conflict Transformation Initiative Visit Kilcooley.” Kilcooley Community Forum. 21 June 2007. <http://www.kilcooley.org/news/?id=221>.

in and knack for community relations, and as Gallagher claims, the UPRG sought to mold her and promote her.<sup>259</sup> Upon the resignation of Iris Robinson from her East Belfast seat in January 2010, the DUP “hijacked” Skillen from the UPRG as its candidate for the by-election, and she subsequently won.<sup>260</sup> As Gallagher interprets the incident, the DUP was attempting to obstruct Gallagher’s own prospective campaign for the Castlereagh Council seat. “They’re doing everything in their fucking power to make sure I’m not a part of it,” he claims, including a shift in the DUP’s policy of marginalizing former paramilitaries.<sup>261</sup> Although Skillen has never been involved in paramilitarism, her UDA affiliations extend beyond work with CTI, as her boyfriend is the 43-year-old former UDA commander of Tullycarnet, Tommy ‘Tinker’ Taylor.<sup>262</sup> However, Gallagher also expresses a sense of betrayal given Skillen’s acceptance of the DUP’s offer. McDonald argues instead that the link with the DUP will enable Skillen to do more than she could have as an Independent.<sup>263</sup> Howcroft encapsulates the debate:

I don’t think people like Sharon will ever lose the communities they come from. I don’t think that can be lost. I think she’s done too much in terms of community development and too much good work just to let that go... Will Sharon work against the interests of people at grassroots loyalist communities? I don’t believe she will do that for a second. But then she’s in a position where she has to follow party policy... Will Sharon speak up for it? That remains to be seen. I’m not going to make a judgment on it because it wouldn’t be fair to make a judgment when

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259 ‘Frankie Gallagher. Interview with the author. Charter NI. 6 January 2011.

260 ‘Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 7 January 2011.

261 ‘Ibid.

262 ‘“DUP choice for Iris Robinson’s seat linked to ex-prisoner.” *Belfast Telegraph*. 1 March 2010. <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/dup-choice-for-iris-robinsonrsquo-seat-linked-to-exprisoner-14703055.html>.

263 ‘Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. BSCR. 7 January 2011.

she's just starting out on a course of action, which could bear great fruit.<sup>264</sup>

Given the limited resources of working class loyalists for promoting youth participation in politics, integrating the grassroots into mainstream unionism may offer the most effective option for building this capacity.

In addition to youth engagement, strategies are beginning to emerge to prime loyalist working class communities for civic engagement. One of the more developed and concerted efforts is EXIT, a new East Belfast community activism group established by Sydenham community worker and UVF member David McConnell and operationalized by former paramilitaries. Although he maintains his reservations about the PUP's defiance of unionist unity, the past eight years of work has convinced McConnell of the shortcomings of the district's unionist representatives. McConnell has established numerous community programs for toddlers, mothers, ex-prisoners, and pensioners to fill the gaps and is now transforming these community development initiatives into political capital on behalf of the PUP. McConnell declares, "If you don't go out into the communities and do community development, you'll not gain the support of the community."<sup>265</sup> Therefore, EXIT has adopted a strategy of linking local community development to the politics of the PUP—it has undertaken a community needs analysis and is producing a booklet to discuss the failures of existing politicians and how EXIT and the PUP can offer alternatives. McConnell claims the publication will

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264 John Howcroft. Interview with the author. North Belfast Community Development. 13 January 2011.

265 David McConnell. Interview with the author. Sydenham. 14 January 2011.

be distributed to over 6000 homes.<sup>266</sup> The organization is also running road shows and canvassing on behalf of PUP candidates.

Voter registration is a particularly difficult undertaking and especially indicative of transformation given its loaded history. During the Troubles, most paramilitaries did not register for fear of providing intelligence on their affiliations and whereabouts by indicating their permanent address. Many still believe it is a mechanism for coercing residents into paying outstanding bills and debts, which pervade impoverished working class loyalist communities. Others simply never believed that the process was worthwhile and could generate substantive change. With the shift to peacetime and the opportunity offered by the upcoming Assembly elections, the UDA and UVF leaderships are attempting to demystify the process. Last summer, the UDA orchestrated an independent voter registration drive, which they claim was successful, although there is no public data on the initiative. Groups such as EXIT are also planning leaflet drops and voter registration nights when community workers will go door to door with registration forms. These initiatives strive to build capacity by combating disillusionment and empowering local communities through civic engagement.

Given the charged history of the PUP, its political capacity building is particularly difficult. Although the party recently witnessed a doubling of its membership from 60 in October 2010 to nearly 150 today, its funding and political capabilities remain limited.<sup>267</sup> Therefore, the PUP is engaging with economists, independent researchers, and academics to gain professional guidance on politics in Northern Ireland. In conjunction with local civic groups such as EXIT, this external expertise is helping to develop a critical and

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<sup>266</sup> McConnell. Email to the author. 14 March 2011.

<sup>267</sup> Brian Ervine.

political understanding of the link between local needs and national politics. As Purvis describes, this link had long been absent with the DUP. “We had unionist politicians for years and you couldn’t find them,” she says.<sup>268</sup> In response the PUP employed a policy of open offices and established advice centers where politicians could practically address issues on the ground—which had been one of the formative elements of Sinn Féin’s grassroots politics. McCoubrey also claims to draw lessons from Sinn Féin’s success. In a previous conversation with a leading member of Sinn Féin, McCoubrey describes the essential advice he received: “He says, ‘Engage with the people.’ He says, ‘...if someone comes in and asks you to get a light bulb changed on a street lamp, you make sure you tell the community it was Frank McCoubrey who did it. Don’t let anyone else take credit for it until you get to the stage where your name is imprinted.’”<sup>269</sup>

The loyalist groups are also beginning to articulate proposed policies and to develop a deliberate political strategy. This April, the PUP launched its latest manifesto, a 20-page document describing party goals and policy prescriptions across a range of issues.<sup>270</sup> CPNI’s policies and principles extend across two webpages detailing priorities in the arts, agriculture, policing, parades, tourism, and transport. Although the party is only several months old, the Facebook group has over 1600 “friends.”<sup>271</sup> The two parties are also developing different electoral strategies. While the PUP is standing eight candidates across a range of councils and electoral areas, CPNI is running two candidates

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268 Dawn Purvis. Interview with the author. Stormont. 11 January 2011.

269 Frank McCoubrey.

270 PUP. “Stormont and Local Government: Manifesto 2011.” (Belfast: PUP, 2011).

271 “Community Partnership Northern Ireland.” Facebook. <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100001548533627>.

each for two different councils. According to Gallagher, CPNI is keenly aware of the strategy of vote management, which seeks to maneuver the system of proportional representation via single transferable vote—whereby surplus or ‘unused’ votes can transfer to second-choice candidates—to bolster the potential of party representation in a given electoral area. Such a sophisticated scheme requires considerable perception of the political landscape as well as coordination within the party. While the small size of the party facilitates this coordination, CPNI’s history of community activism and grassroots development instills it with existing capacity to mobilize and serve its constituents.

### *Taking Responsibility for Capacity*

The involvement of the UVF and the UDA in capacity building initiatives represents the most natural transition from violent defense of their working class loyalist communities during the Troubles to unarmed defense during the post-conflict stage. Using the three indicators of *behaving correctly*, *being accountable*, and *acting independently*, an assessment of paramilitary contributions demonstrates a considerable trend of taking responsibility for capacity building.

Across the various initiatives of capacity building, the loyalist paramilitaries continue to fulfill the indicator of *behaving correctly*. Most critically, loyalist participation in community development, education, and civic engagement initiatives represents a marked departure from the violence of the Troubles. Not only do these activities represent lawful conduct, but also adhere to societal standards of self-help. Although some of the local organizations that coordinate these projects are or have formerly been fronts for criminal activities, the loyalist leadership seems to be

transforming the most egregious of these organizations—such as the Northern Belfast criminal den of former UDA brigadier Andre Shoukri. The shift from a corrupt paramilitary establishment to a genuine community program for capacity building demonstrates a commitment to the peace process and the new norms of a post-conflict society. Given the traditionally violent approach of the paramilitaries to advocacy on behalf of their working class loyalist communities, capacity building initiatives signify a concerted effort to harness existing social capital and nascent skills as community activists and to make them relevant to a post-conflict context. These developments also follow through on the PUP and UDP promise of future peace dividends as an argument for working class loyalists to support the ‘Yes’ campaign, which functioned as a referendum on the peace process. While the DUP has failed to ensure that the peace dividends reach loyalist working class communities, the capacity building initiatives of the UVF and the UDA are decisive attempts at remedying this failure.

The increasing willingness and ability of the loyalists to directly assess and address community needs is the most significant means by which the loyalists are fulfilling the indicator of *being accountable*. While the loyalists remain most adept at spearheading local initiatives in areas relevant to the paramilitary experience, such as ex-prisoner rights and restorative justice, the UDA and the UVF are beginning to develop projects outside of these topics of relative expertise. This expansion of initiatives into the fields of education and civic engagement demonstrates that the loyalists are attempting to respond not only to those needs that they are best equipped to manage, but also more broadly to those needs that represent a deficiency in skills essential to succeed in wider society. Therefore, the paramilitaries are facilitating capacity building through innovative

programs such as From Prison to Peace and EXIT, which have undertaken procedures of formal needs analysis in order to better address the limitations of current school curricula and to better facilitate local political activism. Where the loyalists lack the knowledge or resources to develop new initiatives, they are finding external alternatives, as illuminated by McDonald's work with Queen's University and Howcroft's attempts to facilitate leadership opportunities for young people. This high degree of accountability to their working class communities demonstrates the growing maturity of the UVF and the UDA with respect to capacity building.

The UDA or its affiliated UPRG also tend to be more assertive than the more secretive UVF in taking credit for their local projects. Although UVF members participate in a range of important initiatives, only a rare few, such as EPIC and Alternatives are linked to the organization more broadly. Taking ownership in terms of accepting blame, however, is extremely uncommon for both loyalist paramilitary groups. Rather, they tend to create a dichotomy between the paramilitary defenders and the DUP offenders and fail to acknowledge how decades of violence and vigilantism have contributed to the deprivation of their communities. The recent grant proposal of the North Belfast UDA represents an exception to this trend in its recognition of its own missed opportunities to undertake substantive projects for capacity building.

The reemergence and development of loyalist political campaigns also signify a desire to shift accountability for capacity building from the establishment politicians to a grassroots leadership. Burke's decision to stand for election—not because of political ambitions, but due to the lack of alternative candidates—is a particularly cogent example of the growing commitment of loyalist leaders to alter the status quo. Although the



proposed strategy of McCoubrey and Skillen to join with the UUP and the DUP, respectively, demonstrates a continued value of unionist unity, it also indicates potential mechanism of accountability to bind the grassroots directly to the political elites to keep them accountable to working class loyalist communities. What remains indeterminate is the extent to which the UUP and the DUP will hold McCoubrey and Skillen accountable to their own party agendas, undermining the ability of loyalists to effectively feed grassroots interests up to Stormont. In support of this new accountability, the emerging loyalist political configurations are beginning to build their political capacity to aid community capacity. In particular, the loyalist political leaders appear increasingly willing to draw lessons from external advisors and even Sinn Féin representatives, as represented by McCoubrey. This growing awareness and aptitude is enabling mentorship programs and shadowing initiatives prepare young community workers and politicians such as Burke and Bryson to meet the needs of their communities.

Lastly, the UVF and UDA capacity building initiatives have consistently upheld the standard of *acting independently*. Despite the limited funding, resources, and external support, the loyalists consistently manage to mobilize sufficient internal support to undertake a range of programs that exhibit autonomy of action. These projects are not responses to inducements or coercion, but rather sovereign attempts of the UVF and the UDA at contributing to their communities. The independent advocacy of EPIC on behalf of ex-prisoners is a bold instance of taking initiative. Moreover, many of the loyalist paramilitaries who preside over community development organizations typically make very little profit from their endeavors, but rather accept the intrinsic reward of engaging in local capacity building. The loyalists also demonstrate extreme expeditiousness in

implementing local initiatives and campaigns. Notably, the ex-prisoners groups formed in the course of the peace process. Moreover, despite the difficulty of influencing the institutional education system, the recent attention given to the fight against the 11+ examination and subsequent awareness regarding the importance of education have sparked a sudden abundance of initiatives from the research of former PUP leader Dawn Purvis to the innovative programming by McDonald in collaboration with Queen's University and by Ervine in collaboration with the Shannon Trust.

Similarly, the defeat of the 'Robinson Dynasty' last April has inspired the independent action of the new loyalist political groups. Given the recency of this opportunity for political capacity building, the renewal of the PUP and the inception of the CPNI demonstrate both autonomy and expeditiousness in the prelude to the upcoming elections. EXIT is perhaps one of the most impressive examples of independent action, in this case to convene community groups and link development and politics on behalf of the PUP. The CPNI has adopted a parallel strategy to leverage its existing community base in an attempt to build political capital and civic engagement. Moreover, Burke's independent plan to reestablish the Progressive Youth shows the contributions of young people to these fresh campaigns of grassroots organizing and self-motivated action.

Overall, the combination of necessity and ability has made capacity building a beacon of success in the pursuit of taking responsibility for conflict transformation. Both the UVF and the UDA demonstrate thoughtful and resolute campaigns with respect to building community capacity through local initiatives, educational programming, and civic engagement efforts. Their strategies are becoming increasingly innovative and

receptive to local needs, marking the success of all three indicators of taking responsibility for building capacity.

### *Reconceptualizing Norms*

The loyalist paramilitaries and their working class communities claim a sense of profound identity and confused pride from a history both as defenders battle tested at the Somme and as victims oppressed by social neglect. Their identity is reinforced by a pervasive stereotype of loyalists as criminals, gangsters, underachieving students, and destructive members of society. Throughout the Troubles, this identity became inseparable from paramilitarism. Since the Troubles—and despite the positive contributions of the loyalist paramilitaries to conflict transformation—the brand of paramilitarism continues to act as an anchor to the past, impeding demobilization, perpetuating stigmatization, undermining the aspirations of young people, and damaging the prospects of political initiatives. To liberate themselves from these pernicious associations and to more effectively catalyze the process of conflict transformation, the UVF and the UDA need to alter their public image and more importantly, their self-perception, but have taken limited responsibility in achieving this objective. These goals are limited by significant obstacles internally and externally and require multiple efforts to overturn the barriers; however, a new set of norms is slowly beginning to take shape.

### *Constructing Public Space*

Some of the most visible and defining projections of loyalist paramilitarism are the murals commissioned by the UDA and the UVF. Throughout the Troubles, these militaristic images demarcated territory, commemorated fallen comrades, and pledged the

defense of Ulster. They employed sectarian symbols including paramilitary flags and the Red Hand of Ulster and threatening themes including masked and armed men and even the Grim Reaper. The murals have become a mark of both intimidation and cultural identity, especially for working class loyalist communities. Since the Good Friday Agreement republican murals have undergone a distinctive shift in tone and have largely become a tool to discuss social, cultural, and political issues. Meanwhile, loyalist murals continue to depict anachronistic themes of violence. Whereas republican murals have become a form of public art, loyalist murals are widely still controlled by the paramilitaries who claim they seek conflict transformation, but permit the persistence of aggressive imagery and sectarian statements, perhaps in an attempt to retain some of the last vestiges of their old legitimacy.

In 2006, the Northern Ireland Arts Council announced a £3.3 million initiative called “Re-imaging Communities” to remove and replace the most offensive murals.<sup>272</sup> Through this campaign and a general push by the many loyalist paramilitaries and community development organizations such as Groundwork, many murals are being redesigned to depict historical events such as the Battle of the Boyne and the Battle of the Somme and famous Protestants such as Andrew Jackson and the Queen of England. Others have shifted entirely from symbols of religious or national identity, focusing more on local identity. Many of the re-imaged murals reflect a profound sense of nostalgia and a romanticization of the past, whereby the history of the Troubles is erased and replaced with printed images of old pubs and dance halls.<sup>273</sup> In the absence of other features of

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272’ “Re-imaging Communities Programme.” Arts Council of Northern Ireland. July 2006. <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/news/2006/Booklet.pdf>.

273’ Bill Rolston, “‘Trying to Reach the Future Through the Past’: Murals and Memory in Northern Ireland.” *Crime Media Culture* 6, no. 3 (2010): 297.

loyalist working class cultural heritage, these sentimental images and the murals themselves have become critical sources of identity. There is, however, the beginning of an awakening to the potential of themes that speak to the local needs, which underlie the impoverished loyalist identity. One of the murals funded by the Arts Council depicts a human rights declaration of six basic rights, as expressed by local community groups. These rights include mental health care, sustainable employment, the opportunity to participate, the regeneration of communities rather than gentrification, treatment with dignity and respect, and proper education.<sup>274</sup> Although the mural sits in the center of what was formerly the territory of UDA boss Johnny Adair, the it has remained unvandalized since its unveiling in 2008.<sup>275</sup> The endurance of this new image demonstrates the legitimacy of themes beyond paramilitarism.

Elsewhere, however, there is an ongoing resistance or lack of initiative to change the paramilitary murals. One of the most famous murals lies at the seat of McDonald's sphere of influence at the intersection of Sandy Row and Linfield Road, depicts a UDA man with a gun and a balaclava, and proclaims "You are now entering Sandy Row, Heartland of South Belfast Ulster Freedom Fighters." Although McDonald claims that he would like to see the image replaced, the project has stalled for more than a decade. Tom Ekin, the Alliance Party Belfast City Councillor and Weavers' Court businessman—whose premises lie just around the corner from Sandy Row—has personally tried to fund the re-imaging of this and other UDA murals. Soon after the Good Friday Agreement, Ekin commissioned an independent artist to plan a replacement for the Sandy Row mural

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274: "Lower Shankill: Finished Artwork." Belfast City Council. June 2009.  
<http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/re-image/lowershankill.asp>

275: Ibid.

and provided local UDA members with the design, which they never implemented. In 2000, he persuaded local UDA members to redesign a particularly aggressive mural on Linfield Road along the way to his business park and paid £5000 to replace the image with one depicting the history of Sandy Row.<sup>276</sup> Nonetheless, no action was taken. In 2002, Ekin and the Alliance party voted to elect a Sinn Féin candidate to the position of Lord Mayor. Ekin claims that mural was replaced overnight with a white wall and the words “Irish Republican Alliance, Vote Tom Ekin,” which he bitterly remarks was “the result, no doubt of much intellectual effort.”<sup>277</sup> The mural was ultimately replaced with the brightly colored drawings of a children’s group, but the Sandy Row mural endures.

In 2009, McDonald’s community development organization, Belfast South Community Resources posted on its website a poll regarding the proposed re-imaging. With 69.9% or 276 votes to date, the Sandy Row community voted in favor of the mural remaining unchanged.<sup>278</sup> McDonald, however, has indicated an interest in overhauling the mural without the community consensus he had once hoped to rally. Within McDonald’s broader plans to bring former UDA commander John McMichael back to life for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, there is the potential to design the new mural around McMichael. This plan, McDonald hopes, will give a voice to the political contributions of the UDA, to depict “a good strong leader and the message [McMichael] was trying to give...that should be the focus and the drive to make us what we need to be

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276: Tom Ekin, “Re: UDA Research.” Email to author. 4 May 2010.

277: Ibid.

278: “What would you like to see happen to Linfield Road Mural?” Belfast South Community Resources. 15 March 2011. <http://www.bscr.co.uk/component/poll/15-what-would-you-like-to-see-happen-to-linfield-road-mural.html>.

rather than what we used to be.”<sup>279</sup> Although the loyalist paramilitaries continue to underplay this political history, especially to their own communities, it offers a viable alternative by defending a distinctly loyalist identity, but transforming the norms that uphold a legacy of paramilitarism.

### *Shaping Public Discourse*

The media has long portrayed the loyalist paramilitaries as violent and sectarian convicts who refuse to reform, exploit their own communities, and impede conflict transformation within broader society. While some figures such as McDonald and Hutchinson have become acceptable voices in the media, traditional stereotypes have held fast in both mainstream newspapers and sensationalist tabloids, as they continue to emphasize the destructive activities of the loyalist paramilitaries, but disregard their positive contributions to their communities. Perhaps the most damaging publicity emerges from the *Sunday World*, a widely read weekly publication committed to scandals and controversies either real or concocted. One of the centerpieces of its agenda is continued attacks on the loyalist paramilitaries, which serve to denigrate the UDA, the UVF, and their individual members and to severely damage their reputations. As UDA-affiliated community worker Brian Watson comments, the media wants to “drag you back.”<sup>280</sup> Although the *Sunday World* hurls equal abuse at politicians and personalities from other communities, positive publicity from other sources offers a viable counterbalance to these reports; however, for the loyalists the near absence of positive publicity leaves the negative portrayals as the dominant public impression.

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279 Jackie McDonald. Interview with the author. Belfast South Community Resources. 13 April 2010.

280 Brian Watson. Interview with the author. Lower Shankill Community Association. 12 April 2010.

In late 2009, the *Sunday World* ran a story on community worker David McConnell accusing him of connections to the UVF. In particular, the article described a photograph capturing a meeting led by McConnell and attended by a group of burly skinhead UVF paramilitaries. In response to these allegations, the Belfast City Council barred McConnell from the Inverary Community Center in Sydenham, the location of his office and the hub of his myriad community initiatives.<sup>281</sup> In fact, the photograph depicts a community town hall meeting packed with over a hundred plastic chairs occupied by women, pensioners, and disabled residents. There were only a dozen unidentified men wearing track suits and standing along the wall in the back.<sup>282</sup> Although McConnell has written to the *Sunday World* to refute the allegations in the original article, the City Council has refused to grant him access to the Iverary Community Center until he secures a retraction from the *Sunday World*. “These people need to get off the back of the loyalist people,” McConnell demands.<sup>283</sup> In the meantime, McConnell is attempting to continue his work from home, but fears that the reports have done considerably more damage than his exclusion from his community center. Despite the extensive community support voiced through comments on Facebook, blogs, and online newspapers, McConnell worries that the negative publicity will dissuade potential patrons residing outside of Sydenham from participating in his programs. In particular, McConnell laments that

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281<sup>1</sup> Chris McCann. “My reputation is in ruins, says community worker.” *Belfast Telegraph*. 26 August 2010. <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/community-telegraph/east-belfast/news/my-reputation-is-in-ruins-says-community-worker-14925393.html>.

282<sup>2</sup> Untitled. “Sydenham Community Development Agency.” Facebook. 14 December 2010. <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=163606877016501&set=a.157649627612226.27092.152812974762558&type=1&theater>

283<sup>3</sup> David McConnell.



without political representation, individuals in a position of influence, there is no significant means to combat the *Sunday World* and the pernicious consequences.<sup>284</sup>

Another UVF member asserts that the negative media portrayals dissuade community members from taking the initiative to become politicians, who can empower working class loyalist community. As a single father of two, he says,

It's about trying to get somebody motivated, because the likes of me or local people that I know that could do a fine good job [in politics], but they will get slaughtered, and I mean slaughtered. Their families will be brought into it... Your kids get it in school: 'Your daddy's in the paper, your daddy's this, your daddy's that.' That's the off-put.<sup>285</sup>

The personal sacrifice of being a leader in loyalist communities demands resilience, local support, and the capacity to counter the attacks of the tabloids; however, without existing political representation, those with the essential leadership qualities remain dissuaded from standing as political candidates.

Although the mainstream media tends to offer less biased stories on loyalism, it often falls into the same trap of stereotyping. Notably, during the uproar surrounding the election of Sharon Skillen, the *Belfast Telegraph* ran a story taken from the previous weekend's reporting in the *Sunday World*.<sup>286</sup> The media more broadly made Skillen's entrance into politics a tumultuous one, with a deluge of questioning about her background, associations, and intentions. Social media has expanded and amplified these opportunities to perpetuate negative stereotypes, with popular blog and networking sites, such as "Slugger O'Toole" and Facebook creating open forums for comments that often

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284 Ibid.

285 Interview with UVF member. Belfast. 13 January 2011.

286 "Iris girl's love shock." *Belfast Telegraph*. 2 March 2010. <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/sunday-life/iris-girls-love-shock-14704952.html>.

reveal dogged aversion to the paramilitaries and spread vitriolic analysis of current events. Although it remains infrequent, these public debates are also creating space for the recognition of change and are beginning to generate a more balanced image of the paramilitaries and their contributions to conflict transformation.

In addition to the near constant fight against negative media portrayals, the loyalist paramilitaries are deeply frustrated by the lack of positive publicity when they make constructive contributions to society. With respect to the local work to which the UVF and the UDA are contributing, McConnell says, “you can’t publicize it; nobody will listen.”<sup>287</sup> PUP leader Brian Ervine claims that this largely stems from the fact that community development work is “not sexy;” however, the *Belfast Telegraph* did manage to write an article on the PUP’s campaign to bring groceries to the elderly during the snowy winter weather of December 2010.<sup>288</sup> This positive publicity is rarely extended to the community work of the UVF and the UDA; however, the political statements of UDA brigadier Jackie McDonald have become a frequent topic of *Belfast Telegraph* journalist Brian Rowan. Most recently, Rowan has written about McDonald’s plans to meet with Unionist and nationalist politicians and to embark on a speaking tour around the United States.<sup>289</sup> UTV, a Northern Irish television station, also interviewed McDonald regarding his call for increased support for ex-prisoners.<sup>290</sup> Still, some of the more significant steps

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<sup>287</sup> David McConnell.

<sup>288</sup> Brian Ervine; Fiona Rutherford. “PUP in call to aid elderly as temperatures plunge.” *Belfast Telegraph*. 9 December 2010. <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/community-telegraph/east-belfast/news/pup-in-call-to-aid-elderly-as-temperatures-plunge-15025545.html>.

<sup>289</sup> Brian Rowan. “UDA chief: we want to strengthen the peace.” *Belfast Telegraph*. 24 February 2011. <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/uda-chief-we-want-to-strengthen-the-peace-15094389.html>.

<sup>290</sup> “Ex-political prisoners ‘need support.’” UTV. 14 March 2011. <http://www.u.tv/News/Ex-political-prisoners-at-risk/6ce3a230-660f-4643-968a-714d70e4ef8d>.

of conflict transformation remain largely uncelebrated, as was the case with the decommissioning of the UDA in January 2010. Upon its announcement to the public, simultaneous accounts of plots against Gordon Brown's leadership, concerns over the pending Hillsborough Agreement, and disclosure of Iris Robinson's affair all emerged the same day and overshadowed the UDA's move.<sup>291</sup>

For the UVF, the convention of secrecy, which traditionally served as a measure to ensure the internal security of the organization, continues to plague its attempts at gaining recognition for its contributions to community development and to political activism. In particular, the UVF often fails to claim responsibility for local initiatives and campaigns driven by its members. Moreover, while McDonald is unabashed about his membership, his past, and his loyalty, UVF leader John Graham remains a mysterious and widely unnamed figure and the UVF members continue to deny their affiliations. This extreme caution has ensured that the PUP is the only public voice of the UVF and that the positive contributions of the organization remain unaccountable. McConnell laments, "I've been trying to change it for the last eight years, and I'm not getting anywhere fast."<sup>292</sup>

In lieu of positive publicity by the mainstream media, the UVF and the UDA have developed independent outlets. Throughout the Troubles, *Combat* magazine provided a voice for the UVF, especially to its core in Shankill. The publication offered critical political thought during the 1970s, but became increasingly sectarian during the 1980s.

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<sup>291</sup> Martin Kettle, "Hewitt and Hoon's great gamble," *The Guardian*. 6 January 2010. [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jan/06/hoon-hewitt-gordon-brown-labour](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jan/06/hoon-hewitt-gordon-brown-labour). 30 April 2010; "'No progress' in policing talks says Sinn Féin," *BBC News*. 6 January 2010. [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/8447279.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/8447279.stm). 30 April 2010; "Iris Robinson statement in full," *BBC News*. 6 January 2010. [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/8444365.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/8444365.stm). 30 April 2010.

<sup>292</sup> David McConnell.

After the Good Friday Agreement was concluded, *Combat* changed its name to the less militaristic label *The Purple Standard*; however, it retains its acerbic statements and violent messages, recently calling British war protesters “evil scum” and “Muslim pigs.”<sup>293</sup> The tone and themes of *The Purple Standard* appear to run counter to the UVF’s progressive agenda of civilianization and the PUP’s assertive campaign for seats in May, indicating a lack of unanimity between the UVF leadership and membership. Although senior UVF leaders claim that the organization has thrown its support behind the civilianization initiative, neither the UVF nor the PUP has successfully eradicated the venomous thinking circulated by *The Purple Standard*. Moreover, senior PUP member Ken Wilkinson has contributed statements to the magazine, thereby giving it his tacit support.<sup>294</sup> The ongoing publication of such bigotry and anger undermines the UVF’s proposed goals of conflict transformation and reinforces widespread public stereotypes, although it remains unclear whether the organization recognizes this contradiction between its actions and its words.

These mixed messages—generated by the contrast between the UVF’s stated intentions and the continued paramilitary murals and aggressive stance in *The Purple Standard*—have been integrated into the fabric of the Shankill. Moreover, the prominent position of the murals within the commercial strip of the Shankill contributes to their widespread exposure not only to the loyalist working class community, but also to international tourists. For the past several years, EPIC has led tours of West Belfast in coordination with its PIRA counterpart Coiste. While these tours offer participants a compelling overview of the history of the Troubles, at least one of the tour guides, a UVF

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293’ “Evil Scum Defile Remembrance Day,” *The Purple Standard* 26. January 2011.

294’ Ken Wilkinson, “▼▼▼▼An Opinion from Ken Wilkinson,” *The Purple Standard* 26. January 2011.

ex-prisoner perpetuates an image of the Shankill that does not reflect the essential conflict transformation taking place or even a desire for it to unfold. Rather, this guide speaks using unapologetic, intimidating, and sectarian language. Although locals claim that the interface between the traditionally UVF territory of Upper Shankill and the UDA territory of Lower Shankill has completely eroded, the EPIC tour guide refused to walk beyond that former dividing line. This rhetoric only further embeds misperceptions of working class loyalism not only by Belfast community and Northern Irish society, but also by tourists.

The UDA has endured similar incidents, as occurred with the offensive statements in the magazine *Warrior*, which is widely associated with longtime UDA brigadier for the Londonderry/North Antrim brigade, Billy ‘The Mexican’ McFarland. The magazine is known for its fascist perspectives and advocacy of an ‘Independent Ulster,’ but in 2009, the magazine published sectarian and racist material that the local MLA branded “blatant and sinister incitement to hatred.”<sup>295</sup> One article defended the murder of a recent UDA victim; another glorified the intimidation of Romanian families in South Belfast.<sup>296</sup> Reports also suggested that the UDA intimidated local residents into purchasing the magazine.<sup>297</sup> The North Antrim/Londonderry UPRG representative, David Malcolm immediately condemned and sought to distance himself from the publication.<sup>298</sup> Belfast

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295<sup>1</sup> Will Ellison, “Anger over ‘racist and sectarian’ UDA magazine,” *Belfast Telegraph*. 22 July 2009. <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/anger-over--racist-and-sectarian-uda-magazine-14423168.html>.

296<sup>1</sup> Idib.

297<sup>1</sup> “UPRG deny involvement with ‘Warrior’ magazine.” *Londonderry Sentinel*. 22 July 2009. [http://www.londonderrysentinel.co.uk/news/local/uprg\\_deny\\_involvement\\_with\\_warrior\\_magazine\\_1\\_2097247](http://www.londonderrysentinel.co.uk/news/local/uprg_deny_involvement_with_warrior_magazine_1_2097247).

298<sup>1</sup> “‘Warrior’ magazine row rumbles on.” *Londonderry Sentinel*. 23 July 2009.

UPRG man Frankie Gallagher confirms that Malcolm is perhaps one of the more progressive and politically savvy members of the group.<sup>299</sup> Moreover, the leaders of the Belfast UDA claim that the magazine does not represent their views, and rather that the North Antrim branch has become disaffected from the rest of the organization. Nonetheless, the media largely continues to paint the UDA in broad brushstrokes despite its parochial nature, which has intensified with the organization's ongoing dissolution. North Belfast has taken such misperceptions into its own hands, executing a formal 'Community Independent Monitoring Commission' in opposition to the broad reporting of the official IMC.<sup>300</sup> The North Belfast UDA has twice undertaken this process, holding conferences attended by the official IMC. Howcroft claims that North Belfast UDA and UPRG are currently considering the continuation of this process as an internal "accountability mechanism."<sup>301</sup> Other areas have yet to attempt a similar endeavor.

In addition to publications by the UVF and the UDA, independent community outlets attempt to fill the gaps between the organizations' community contributions and mainstream reporting. The *Shankill Mirror*, a free monthly community newspaper based on the Shankill Road, is one of the most successful. Founded in 1999 with the support of former UDA Supreme Commander Andy Tyrie, the *Shankill Mirror* sought to respond to a local need for representation in the media and to reflect the concerns and interests of the local community, which had long been misrepresented.<sup>302</sup> The newspaper has since

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299 'Frankie Gallagher. Interview with the author. Charter NI. 21 April 2010.

300 'John Howcroft. Interview with the author. North Belfast Community Development. 13 January 2011.

301 'Ibid.

302' "Shankill Mirror: Northern Ireland's leading community newspaper." Making Good Money in Belfast. 2006. [http://www.makinggoodmoney.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=25&Itemid=37](http://www.makinggoodmoney.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=25&Itemid=37)

acquired a readership of over 32,000 mostly in West and North Belfast, and was recently named one of the top “successful social economy businesses” in deprived areas.<sup>303</sup> It has made a particular impact reporting on relevant news and community initiatives, advertising local businesses, encouraging voter registration, and applauding the accomplishments of young people. It occasionally publishes editorials by unionist politicians, and although it maintains loyalist associations, it also runs articles regarding cross-community events and nationalist areas of Belfast. This focus on local success stories and society-wide peace building continues to contribute to community confidence.

The PUP and the CPNI have also started aggressive media campaigns, primarily through independent websites and Facebook pages. These vehicles are particularly essential in the PUP’s effort to change its image given its long history of association with the UVF. The PUP is perpetually explaining this relationship to the media, but former PUP leader Dawn Purvis suggests that it is a futile struggle. “The media like simple explanations,” she says. “So therefore, they liken the relationship between the PUP and the UVF to the relationship between Sinn Féin and the IRA. And it’s not the same.”<sup>304</sup> This simple explanation, Purvis suggests, is one of the primary barriers to the success of the PUP. The PUP has now taken to paving its own path, publicizing its community work distributing groceries to the elderly stranded by the wintry weather, its protest against the discrimination of the HET, and the recent appearance of Councillor John Kyle at the Belfast city Saint Patrick’s Day parade.<sup>305</sup> Breaking with traditional sectarian politics, he

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303 Ibid.

304 Dawn Purvis. Interview with the author. Stormont. 11 January 2011.

305 “Progressive Unionists.” Facebook. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Progressive-Unionists/165234446845506>.

was the only unionist politician in attendance.<sup>306</sup> This statement indicates the PUP's growing awareness of building support through a public profile. The Facebook groups of the PUP and the CPNI demonstrate the incredible capacity of social media to uncover the contributions of these groups at the grassroots level. They have enabled the launch of aggressive publicity campaigns, but also facilitate community relationships, open debate on social issues, and messages of support. "You're the only voice we have. Keep up the good work," one comment on the PUP Facebook page reads.<sup>307</sup>

### *Defining Self-Perception*

While the public image of the UVF and the UDA remains in part beholden to the reception of the broader public, it is inextricably linked to the self-perception of the loyalist paramilitaries and of their working class communities. The historical misinterpretation, negative media portrayals, and widespread denigration of the loyalist paramilitaries and their communities have contributed to their eroded sense of identity and self-worth and to a pervasive siege mentality; however, restoring this self-confidence from the inside has the potential to impact both the internal process of conflict transformation as well as the recognition of that process by other segments of society.

The relationship between institutionalized or social normative stigmatization and self-perception has its roots in the criminological concept of 'secondary deviance,' which states that in response to punishment, criminal offenders undergo a change in their

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306' "NI joins global Saint Patrick's Day celebrations." UTV. 17 March 2011. <http://www.u.tv/News/NI-joins-global-St-Patricks-celebrations/a2f2f9cc-2fb2-493c-a74a-27fd986aef7b>.

307' "Progressive Unionists." Facebook. 8 December 2010. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Progressive-Unionists/165234446845506>.



identity and subsequently commit more strongly to their deviant behavior.<sup>308</sup> From a broader sociological perspective, the loyalist paramilitaries and their working class communities have been victims of this same process whereby state repression, through a policy of criminalization during the Troubles, and perpetual social exclusion and negative media attention since the conflict, have created a damaged self-concept.<sup>309</sup> As Gallagher describes it, “the criminalization has been so effective in terms of loyalism that it’s just a tarnished brand.”<sup>310</sup> Therefore, the names ‘UDA,’ ‘UVF,’ and ‘loyalist’ have become damaging classifications that the paramilitaries and their communities continue to suffer. While many argue that the PIRA still exists as an organization, the name has been consigned to history and their communities have been liberated from the paramilitary association. In loyalism, only the rare celebrities such as McDonald and Spence have learned to wear the badge unabashedly, but the loyalist brand largely serves as a scarlet letter that risks facilitating loyalist manipulation by the media, preventing the reintegration of ex-prisoners and paramilitaries, and stymying the success of young people. For some, there is a general acceptance of this norm, as West Belfast UPRG representative, Billy ‘Twister’ McQuiston suggests, “At the end of every conflict people need someone to blame, and unfortunately in the PUL [Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist] community it’s us.”<sup>311</sup> Meanwhile, Brian Ervine rejects the norm, preferring the term

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308 Donatella della Porta, “Research on Social Movements and Political Violence.” *Qualitative Sociology* 31, no. 3 (2008): 228.

309 See Colin Crawford, *Defenders or Criminals?: Loyalist Prisoners and Criminalization*. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1999).

310 Frankie Gallagher. Interview with the author. Charter NI. 6 January 2011.

311 Billy McQuiston.

“working class unionism” as a means to remove what he sees as a pejorative label and to uplift his community.<sup>312</sup>

On the collective level, secondary deviance has created a distinctive social cohesion within the UDA, the UVF, and their communities, whereby “narratives of stigmatization serve to insulate former combatants from their communities” and “collective nostalgia” bolsters internal cohesion.<sup>313</sup> These agents of secondary deviance are profoundly evident in McDonald’s resistance to the transforming the UDA into the UDU and in the romanticized murals on the Shankill. The resultant organizational cohesion becomes even more difficult to break when paired with the persistent narrative that loyalist paramilitaries are inherently prone to destructive behavior rather than products of structural conditions that stimulated violence. Therefore, the UDA and the UVF act as safe havens for the loyalist paramilitaries, and although the internal cohesion creates significant social capital—which the UVF intends to harness in its attempted civilianization—it also dissuades many members from seeking alternative means of employment and reintegration into nonviolent community activities.

The idea of reintegration is itself an ambiguous concept in the loyalist paramilitary sensibility. The organizations tend to dismiss any differences between themselves and their working class communities. While this philosophy emphasizes the local services and leadership offered by the paramilitaries as residents of their communities, it fails to recognize the psychological barriers that inhibit normalization.

Speaking as a civilian, a senior UVF member proposed that the memberships of the UVF

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312 Brian Irvine.

313 Britt Sloan and James Cockayne, “Terrorism, Crime, and Conflict: Exploiting the Differences Among Transnational Threats?” Policy Brief. Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (February 2011): 7.

and the UDA “need to see themselves as citizens as opposed to someone who was a part of an armed organization.”<sup>314</sup> Moreover, he suggests that the membership of each organization needs to independently detach itself from the tarnished names of the UVF and the UDA, despite the positive contributions made under the organizational banners.

Substantive reintegration of the loyalist paramilitaries also requires overcoming the psychological barriers of their communities, which broadly continue to perceive the paramilitaries as contributing to violence rather than to constructive processes. Several organizations, such as Groundwork Northern Ireland, have begun to challenge this stereotype. Over the past several years, the Groundwork has begun to work closely with the North Belfast UDA, including Bunting and Howcroft, and its UVF counterparts, most notably Billy Hutchinson on various community initiatives. “We didn’t take a high moral ground whenever it came to working with ex-combatants, ex-prisoners, or indeed organizations that hadn’t decommissioned,” says Sylvia Gordon, the director of Groundwork.<sup>315</sup> That engagement is helping to rebuild trust between the community and the loyalist paramilitaries, a development that is particularly significant to North Belfast, where the criminal elements such as the former UDA brigadier Andre Shoukri and the former commander of the UVF Mount Vernon battalion have long undermined the community through extortion, racketeering, and drugs. The recent collaboration between reliable community organizations and loyalist paramilitaries is helping to dismantle the stigmatization of the paramilitaries and to restore the confidence of the communities.

The UVF and the UDA need to continue this process on an independent basis, curtailing organizational cohesion and nostalgia that are counterproductive to

<sup>314</sup> Interview with senior UVF member. Belfast. 10 January 2011.

<sup>315</sup> Sylvia Gordon. Interview with the author. Groundwork Northern Ireland. 23 April 2010.

reconceptualizing norms and to conflict transformation. Most critically, Purvis suggests that the leadership of the loyalist paramilitaries needs to “hold up the mirror and encourage people to move on.”<sup>316</sup> While the organizations tolerate some internal challengers, recent events demonstrate that the acceptance of unrepresentative statements and radical proposals has its limits. The UVF recently experienced such internal conflict with its most renowned, albeit long retired, spokesperson, Gusty Spence. In the aftermath of the Bobby Moffett murder, Spence reprimanded the organization and demanded that they “disband now.”<sup>317</sup> The statement was widely accepted by the media, but a senior UVF member suggested that it also demonstrated that Spence was merely trying to save face by “sanitizing the murder” and again calling for the organization to disband.<sup>318</sup> Rather, to the organization, Spence was no longer a credible voice. Within the UDA, many reject the bold public image of brigadier Jackie McDonald, who has gone so far as to have met with prominent republicans such as Sinn Féin MLA and former PIRA commander Martin McGuinness. These moves have fostered considerable internal resentment against McDonald for having moved too fast to truly represent the organization. Similarly, the outspoken UPRG member Frankie Gallagher is increasingly ignored for his progressive beliefs about DDR and political engagement. Therefore the mirror remains warped.

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316 Dawn Purvis. Interview with the author. Stormont. 11 January 2011.

317 Heather McGarrigle, “Founder member of UVF Gusty Spence tells the group to disband.” *Belfast Telegraph*. 10 November 2010. <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/founder-member-of-uvf-gusty-spence-tells-the-group-to-disband-15000134.html>.

318 Interview with senior UVF member. Belfast. 10 January 2011.

One senior UVF member suggested that the mirror needs to be cracked altogether, but that the organizations fear what they will find.<sup>319</sup> Given persistent attacks by republican and unionist politicians, middle class residents, and the media, such a candid process of self-assessment requires significant confidence, but offers the opportunity for honest evaluation. The loyalist paramilitaries were fundamentally built to fight a sectarian battle; however, this does not preclude a redefinition of the organizations for a new battle against classism, racism, and homophobia. These threats are not about an external enemy, but first and foremost about self-perception, which the UVF and the UDA remain slow to address.

In order to most effectively combat these new threats, the loyalist paramilitaries are beginning to develop a new norm of “loyalist unity” that rejects organizational boundaries and instead calls on working class loyalists from across both UVF and UDA communities. Although the organizations have coalesced for significant initiatives in the past—most notably under the CLMC banner to announce the 1994 loyalist ceasefire—the vestigial trust and cooperation was largely lost during the loyalist feuding in 2000. Subsequently, the majority of community development projects function on behalf of their marginally different UVF or UDA constituents, as evidenced by the two ex-prisoners associations of EPIC and Charter. The internal interfaces between the UVF Upper Shankill and the UDA Lower Shankill, the UVF Mount Vernon community and the UDA Tiger’s Bay community retain their associations and significant. Moreover, each community has its own pub in the divided public and social space.

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319 Ibid.

There is growing evidence, however, that the barriers between the UVF and the UDA are beginning to thaw. “The animosity has dissipated,” one senior UVF member claimed. “The lessons from the feud in 2000 have been lessons that won’t be forgotten.”<sup>320</sup> He noted that working class communities caught up in the paramilitary violence still bear resentment over the feuds, but that the paramilitaries are increasingly cooperating on community development work. In particular, the UVF and the UDA are “engaging together and looking across the divide together” in supporting anti-sectarianism campaigns and in managing the external interfaces with republican communities.<sup>321</sup> But former PUP leader Purvis claims that substantive loyalist unity remains out of reach. “I can’t ever see that,” she says.<sup>322</sup> Despite the isolated instances of cooperation, she claims that the historical competition between the two organizations is too great for lasting loyalist unity.

Only a scarce few are beginning to rally to create a unified political front against these new threats of classicism, racism, and homophobia rather than against the old sectarian enemy. Although a new loyalist unity political configuration will not arise in time for the upcoming May election, those who envision such a party suggest that there is growing support within both UVF and UDA communities to unite in the struggle for their working class constituents. Already in East Belfast, UVF veteran Jim Wilson claims that the three groupings of the UDA, the UVF, and the RHC hold regular meetings on community issues and are “taking off the tattoos that we have on our heads and start to

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<sup>320</sup> Interview with senior UVF member. Belfast. 10 January 2011.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Dawn Purvis. Interview with the author. Stormont. 11 January 2011.

form a political party that's for working class loyalism."<sup>323</sup> This new initiative would demonstrate to politicians, to the public, and most importantly, to the paramilitaries' own working class loyalist communities a significant change in norms and commitment to transcending tribalism. As Wilson describes, "After this election loyalism has to have a good look at itself; it needs to sit down and look at itself within, and it needs to realize that it needs representation and good representation, and it doesn't matter whether you're an ex-UVF, -Red Hand, or -UDA man. If you're fit for the purpose and fit for the job, and fit to be able to do that for *our* community [emphasis added], then you should be electable and you should stand."<sup>324</sup> Such plans have yet to be realized, but the prospect of loyalist unity has the potential to build significant self-confidence and have a transformative effect on working class loyalist communities.

### *Taking Responsibility for Norms*

Of the three processes of conflict transformation, reconceptualizing norms is undoubtedly the most difficult given its pervasive societal impact and close association with personal and collective identity. The application of the three indicators of *behaving correctly*, *being accountable*, and *acting independently* to the process demonstrates that the UVF and the UDA are struggling considerably to take responsibility for comprehensive change.

The work of the UVF and the UDA in reconceptualizing norms bears little evidence of *behaving correctly*. With respect to reconceptualizing norms, the conduct of the loyalists is lawful, but not in accordance with the peace process. Given the ultimate

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<sup>323</sup> Jim Wilson. Interview with the author. PUP Office. 14 January 2011.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

goal of the peace process to normalize society, the persistence of paramilitaristic imagery, sectarian rhetoric, and the loyalist brand names seem to work against this goal. Despite the cessation of violence, these forms of norm building embed in loyalist working class communities the incitements that once sparked sectarian attacks and loyalist feuding. In particular, the anachronistic, threatening, and nostalgic paramilitary murals sustain a public space that displays constant reminders of past violence, territorialism, and community control. While these processes of reconceptualizing the norms that shape public space and discourse, the unseen process of reconceptualizing norms that define the internal values and structures of the loyalist paramilitary organizations remains even more difficult to implement. In particular, the loyalist brand names and self-conception contradict the social standards of reintegration, which would abolish the paramilitaries in their current form and function.

Nonetheless, the loyalists also exhibit isolated instances of behaving correctly, in a way that supports the peace process and the standard of normalization. The coordination of the North Belfast UDA and UVF with Groundwork shows a willingness to remove psychological barriers with their working class loyalist communities through action if not through a reform of norms. Despite the media attacks on McConnell, his persistent defense of his innocence and determination to continue his community work from home demonstrate a dogged effort to change perceptions and combat spurious media reports. Lastly, while the recent emergence of loyalist unity remains a novel development, the prospect of building intra-community relation is an instance of positive behavior that has the potential to build significant solidarity that exemplifies a peaceful society and alter existing norms.



The UVF and the UDA efforts to reconceptualize norms also fail to fulfill the indicator of *being accountable*. Most critically, the loyalists largely fail to accept ownership for lack of progress in reconceptualizing norms. While the poll on how to re-image the Sandy Row mural is a positive step, the UDA fails to hold itself accountable for providing strong leadership that delivers substantive action. Meanwhile, the UVF leadership is seriously failing to hold accountable members that produce the sectarian material of *The Purple Standard* and perpetuate racist vitriol and intolerant imagery during the EPIC Shankill Road tour. This failure to be accountable infuses public debate with an air of loyalist intolerance and bigotry that is not representative of the goal of fundamental change. Only the North Belfast UDA has established a mechanism of internal checks through its Community IMC. Given the social deficit created by decades of violent paramilitarism, the UVF and the UDA need to ensure that there are no incidences of internal abuse of image that further reinforce the pervasive stereotypes. Clamping down on these counterproductive portrayals will demonstrate accountability for the material that the UVF and the UDA produce and lend credence to their claims of conflict transformation.

A campaign of internal accountability also demands of the organizations serious and candid self-assessment that questions “How?” and the extremely painful “Why?” Instead of taking on these challenging questions, the organizations seem beholden to a withering sense of identity encapsulated in their paramilitary existence. Rather, an acceptance of new norms would bestow on the loyalist paramilitary organizations accountability for the perceived erosion of paramilitary and community identity. Still, such vehement devotion to the past fosters imperviousness even to internal attempts at

reconceptualizing norms, as has been the case with prominent figures such as the UVF's Spence, the UDA's McDonald, and the UPRG's Gallagher. Moreover, fear of holding up the proverbial mirror only further entrenches a sense of fatalism and eroded self-esteem.

The UVF's historical secrecy is also preventing the organization from accepting credit for their positive influence in their communities and contributing to their inability to counter negative publicity with positive accounts of their community work. Instead, they maintain a highly discreet profile that underemphasizes their contributions.

Conversely, the UDA tendency to publicize its work helps to mitigate the negative press that it draws. In particular, McDonald functions as an advocate for the group, and his highly public statements extend the profile of the UDA significantly beyond its working class communities. His willingness to speak with the media demonstrates preparedness for public scrutiny and accountability. Meanwhile, the PUP and the CPNI are beginning to implement the widespread use of social media, including blogs and Facebook. These new tools build transparency and establish a system of accountability whereby local leaders can continuously distribute information to constituents and receive immediate feedback on the communities' approval or disapproval of their actions.

The loyalists are also extremely limited in the extent to which they are fulfilling the indicator of being accountable with respect to their working class communities. Although the community is beginning to accept and promote new norms, the UVF and UDA seem resistant to such change due to their own organizational nostalgia and lack of will. This shift manifests itself visually in the new mural themes, such as human rights as depicted on the Shankill Road, which loyalist working class communities are increasingly endorsing. Meanwhile, the paramilitaries' response and replication of the new

community interests remains insufficient. Despite the challenge of altering norms so closely linked to the identities of the UVF and the UDA, the resistance to change effectively contradicts efforts to meet community needs of normalization. This resistance is even more pronounced with respect to the desire to retain the loyalist brand names, which continue to tarnish working class communities and has limited positive impact on their activities and progress. Such a refusal demonstrates selfishness on the part of the loyalist paramilitaries.

*Acting independently* to reconceptualize norms has also been largely unsuccessful. In particular, the potential activities of reconceptualizing norms have demonstrated very little autonomy of action. Despite the opportunity of government funding for re-imaging campaigns, the UVF and the UDA have failed to fundamentally shift the murals away from the theme of violent defense. The re-imaging of the Sandy Row mural succeeded only with the highly targeted and protracted inducements of Ekin. The lack of coercive measures or proposed rewards for suppressing internal sectarian rhetoric has resulted in a failure of action to enact change. Moreover, these efforts suffer from a lack of expeditiousness. In theory, the cause for sectarian incitement ended with the Good Friday Agreement and the cause for territorial incitement ended with the last loyalist feud in 2005. Nonetheless, these forms of bigotry and provocation persist. With respect to the media, rather than lamenting the continued onslaught by the *Sunday World* and the limited outlets for positive publicity, the paramilitaries need to establish an independent and credible alternative to extend the messages to a broader audience in Northern Ireland. While local bulletins and the *Shankill Mirror* represent significant progress on this front, their audiences are local. In addition, the UDA and the UVF need to take the initiative to

develop vehicles for discussing the organizations' successes and vital contributions to the local community and to broader societal dialogue. Lastly, the refusal to relinquish the brand of 'UVF' and 'UDA' shows a blatant lack of initiative that has serious repercussions for reconceptualizing norms. As one of the central elements of identity, the loyalist label remains extremely difficult to remove. While McDonald is one of the most committed proponents of keeping the name, his decision to wear the badge proudly represents a unique instance of acting independently while also effectively reconceptualizing existing norms.

While the UVF and the UDA demand that society changes its tune—which is undoubtedly a necessary element for sustainable change—the loyalist paramilitaries must first hold up the mirror to themselves. Currently, the loyalists demonstrate little success in taking responsibility for reconceptualizing norms across all three indicators. To alter this stagnation in reconceptualizing norms, the organizations need to begin to actively distance themselves from the traditional associations surrounding the UVF and UDA and to produce alternative norms that show a firm commitment to taking responsibility. These shifts will enable them to more effectively catalyze conflict transformation.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS**

Since the Good Friday Agreement, the process of conflict transformation of the loyalist paramilitaries and their working class communities has been extremely arduous

and protracted. Although the language of conflict transformation and of taking responsibility have become embedded in the theory and practice of the loyalist paramilitaries, a clear and systematic evaluation of the UVF and UDA contributions is largely lacking in the existing literature. Instead, the growing literature on the loyalist paramilitaries is beginning to acknowledge their constructive and progressive role in society, but remains largely descriptive. Fundamentally, this study has addressed the question of to what extent the loyalist paramilitaries are engaging in conflict transformation, using the metric of taking responsibility to gauge that progress. Applying the matrix of conflict transformation and taking responsibility facilitates an analytical evaluation that addresses the means and context of conflict transformation and assesses why and how.

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that the answer to this question is inconsistent across the two organizations, the different processes of conflict transformation, and the various indicators of taking responsibility. An overview of the loyalist initiatives of conflict transformation reveals that the UVF and the UDA are participating in initiatives to civilianize, combat crime, provide local justice, and obtain political representation, which serve to restructure relationships with their local communities as well as with the political elites. They are undertaking and developing a plethora of community development projects through ex-prisoner associations and existing community associations, formal and informal educational programming, youth mentorship initiatives, and civic engagement campaigns, which serve to build local capacity. Lastly, the loyalists are beginning to re-image paramilitary murals, establish a

positive image in the media, and reinforce loyalist self-perception, which serve to reconceptualize pervasive norms.

The metric of taking responsibility, gives purpose to this diversity of conflict transformation efforts. Within the historical and present context and given the indicators of *behaving correctly*, *being accountable*, and *acting independently*, the preceding discussion has revealed that the UVF and the UDA have taken the greatest responsibility for building capacity, a moderate degree of responsibility for restructuring relationships, and the least responsibility for reconceptualizing norms. Analyzing how the loyalists are taking responsibility for each of the conflict transformation activities has elucidated the loyalists' level of commitment and the obstacles to further progress.

	Taking Responsibility			
		Behaving Correctly	Being Accountable	Acting Independently
Conflict Transformation	Restructuring Relationships	-	+/-	+/-
	Building Capacity	+	+	+
	Reconcept. Norms	-	-	-

The success of taking responsibility for capacity building stems from the ingrained skills of the loyalist paramilitaries as local community activists—whether through force or through peacebuilding—and from their ability and willingness to transfer these skills to capacity building functions. Subsequently, the longstanding involvement of the paramilitaries in community development efforts has instilled in them

an ability to accurately assess local needs and develop targeted campaigns to remedy these weaknesses and help their communities prosper. Such commitment and experience has also provided a springboard for more ambitious and innovative initiatives of capacity building that lie outside of the purview of traditional activities of the paramilitaries, most notably the development of a 'Protestant education ethic' and of civic engagement. This independent expansion of local self-help mechanisms has generated an awareness of the critical importance of education and civic engagement in sustaining capacity building in the future, as evidenced by the robust effort behind educational initiatives, mentorship programs, and holistic learning opportunities to nurture a new 'distributional' and 'successional' leadership. The commitment of the UVF and the UDA and the nascent success of their efforts demonstrate the profound potential to bring about fundamental and lasting change if they hold themselves accountable. Although the capacity building work of the loyalist paramilitaries may never be sufficient to bring their communities out of poverty without a concurrent program for the provision of social services by the state, the UVF and UDA responsibility for capacity building represents a positive contribution to conflict transformation and a significant alternative pathway in the future of the loyalist paramilitary organizations.

Meanwhile the moderate degree of taking responsibility for restructuring relationships bears evidence to the long history and heavy baggage of crime and defense with the people and of collusion and manipulation with the politicians. The complexity of these relationships continues to impede the prospect of restructuring them and to obscure a clear sense of organizational intent. In particular, the argument for internal social cohesion to reduce the scourge of internal criminality and the persistent calls from

the community for paramilitary policing simultaneously prevent demobilization, which is essential to eventual normalization. These dilemmas regarding the future of DDR require decisive leadership such that which jumpstarted the apparent civilianization within the UVF. A parallel organization-wide process of DDR may not be the most effective strategy for the UDA, given its diffuse brigade structure and highly localized loyalties. Nonetheless, the total absence of a plan for demobilization—if only an active encouragement of its members to dissolve back into their communities—has thus far fueled stagnation. Until the loyalist paramilitaries take full responsibility for changing the relationships with their grassroots communities, the loyalist people will remain bound to informal structures of control, most critically paramilitary law and order. However, especially for the UDA, it remains unclear as to if and when the requisite restructuring of relationships will occur. The relationship between the paramilitaries and the politicians is slightly more dynamic, given the growing trend of accountability. Regardless of a continued devotion to the rhetoric of unionist unity, the loyalist paramilitaries appear increasingly willing to demand the attention of the DUP and other political representatives. Still, the resurrection of the PUP and the establishment of the CPNI and other independent loyalist political configurations have the greatest potential to restructure the relationship. Such independent action and the established relationship of these grassroots parties with loyalist working class communities inherently minimize the distance between the political elite and the grassroots, significantly altering the status quo. Although these new political parties and candidates remain untested by elections, such assertive campaigns and genuine public support represent a real opportunity to



capitalize on the growing political capital, if not during the upcoming election cycle, then increasingly in the future.

Although the respective leaderships of the UDA and the UVF have spearheaded successful efforts of capacity building and attempts at restructuring relationships, their ongoing reticence regarding reconceptualizing norms remains incredibly counterproductive in the broader pursuit of conflict transformation and sustainable peace. The widespread failure to take responsibility for the removal of threatening murals and the prevention of internal vitriol and expressions of bigotry demonstrates a disregard for the changing interests of their communities, which increasingly indicate a readiness for a shift in the public space and discourse. Such tension between the interests of the community and the behavior of the paramilitaries not only tarnishes the paramilitaries, but also prolongs the public association of loyalist working class communities with a violent past. However, the periods of historical introspection within the UDA and particularly within the UVF indicate that the current existing psychological barriers to organizational accountability and reconceptualization of norms are surmountable. Despite fear that a process of self-assessment would erode the loyalist paramilitary identity and delegitimize their past actions, such a process is essential to counteract negative stereotypes, build community confidence, and most critically, reform the organizations to effectively combat the new challenges of classicism, racism, and homophobia. The UVF and the UDA must recognize that such self-critique and fundamentally, the elimination of the loyalist brand names demonstrate pragmatism and adaptability in contending with the future.

This study has demonstrated that overall, the UVF and the UDA are indeed beginning to take responsibility for conflict transformation in their working class loyalist communities. Although significant gaps in taking responsibility are currently inhibiting overarching success, the majority of their conflict transformation activities indicate at least a positive trajectory, if no tangible outcomes have yet been produced. The central limitation of this ongoing progress has been the failure of leading loyalists to effectively promote—within their own communities and within the political class—a vision for the future and a strategy for how to get there. The latest political developments indicate that this vision is beginning to coalesce and take root. Already, the anticipation around the upcoming May elections is fueling nascent loyalist community mobilization and confidence. In just a few weeks, the election has the potential to imbue the loyalist conflict transformation project with new life that may fundamentally alter persistent norms. Regardless of the electoral result, the momentum that has been created and the existing weight behind the loyalist initiatives are likely to increasingly inspire the loyalist paramilitaries to take responsibility for conflict transformation.

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