A Long Peace?
The Future of Unionism in
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Preface

A Long Peace explores the future of unionism in Northern Ireland. It is based on a series of interviews and focus groups, reports from some of which are published on *Slugger O'Toole* (www.sluggerotoole.com), a website on Northern Ireland's politics and culture. Electronic copies of this book can also be downloaded from this site.

The following kindly agreed to be interviewed for the project: Arthur Aughey, Paul Bew, David Brewster, Richard Bullick, Robin Bury, Quentin Davies, Jeffrey Donaldson, Ruth Dudley Edwards, John Dunlop, David Ervine, Jack Gallagher, Roy Garland, Jim Gibney, Michael Gove, Sylvia Hermon, John Hunter, Glenn Jordan, Alex Kane, Liam Kennedy, Gary Kent, Steven King, John Lloyd, Gordon Lucy, Alban Maginness, Nelson McCausland, Henry McDonald, Martin McNeeley, Dermot Nesbitt, Sean O'Callaghan, Shannon O'Connell, Malachi O'Doherty, Lembit Opik, Simon Partridge, George Patten, Henry Reid, Bert Ward and Robin Wilson. We are greatly indebted to the groups of unionists who spoke to us in Portadown, Tyrone, Londonderry, Belfast and Holywood, convened by Chris McGimpsey, Willie Lamrock, Henry Reid and David Thompson.

Of course, the authors alone are responsible for *A Long Peace*. Throughout, we have tried to see unionism from the point of view of unionists themselves.

Necessarily, we have missed rich insights that would come from looking at Northern Ireland through other eyes. That, perhaps, is work for another day.

Finally, we would like to thank the readers of *Slugger O'Toole*. You are invited to join them at www.sluggerotoole.com/unionists for a debate that will run and run...

One: What if?

The 'troubles' always mystified those outside Northern Ireland. On the British mainland, outrage at the latest atrocity alternated with haughty indifference. Western Europeans did their best to ignore a conflict at odds with their self-satisfied post-nationalism. Across the Atlantic, meanwhile, North Americans, high on cod-Irishness, funded terror against a people they made little effort to understand. Today, however, most of a decade into a tortuous, unsteady and incomplete 'peace process', it is the turn of Northern Ireland's people to be confused.

The Provisional Irish Republican Army fought for 25 years for the overthrow of the British State, in a revolutionary struggle with a socialist tinge. Now their political representatives are willing to administer an unmistakably British, unapologetically capitalist system. An army that promised 'no surrender' has stopped well short of its goals. Bernadette McKevitt-Sands – sister of the movement's most famous martyr, the hunger-striker Bobby Sands – is one of those to react angrily. Her brother didn't die for cross-border bodies, she says.[1] Meanwhile, the position of Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams has become increasingly ambiguous, reliant on what Malachi O'Doherty characterises as the 'towering hypocrisy of his determination to judge others but never to be judged himself.'[2] Moderate Catholic nationalists, in turn, have seen their long-term standard bearer, John Hume, vindicated in his search for a constitutional agreement. They have responded with scant gratitude, steadily withdrawing support from the party he led for so many years. A growing number are drawn to Sinn Féin, the IRA's political wing, as it bids to replace Hume's old party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, as the dominant voice of constitutional nationalism. Moderate nationalist leaders seem perturbed at being outflanked by a movement that until so recently regarded the ballot box with contempt, and which brought considerable suffering to Catholic and Protestant alike.

But it is Northern Ireland's unionists who have struggled hardest to comprehend the topsy-turvy world of Northern Ireland's new politics. In 1998, their political representatives negotiated an agreement not dissimilar from one rejected in 1973 in a tumult of civil disobedience. They have split into pro- and anti-agreement camps, and the division between the two is deep and bitter. Both have felt the pain of a string of grievous political insults. Most difficult to accept was a former IRA commander, Martin McGuinness, serving as their Minister for Education and Gerry Adams being feted as an international statesman. With the IRA still lurking in the background, they have been left feeling impotent and under attack. Comparison can be made with the situation thirty years ago, when the SDLP's Paddy Devlin warned colleagues against pushing unionists too far in the peace negotiations at Sunningdale. 'Brian Faulkner is being nailed to a cross', he said of the then leader of the unionists. 'There is no way Faulkner can sell this.'[3] And indeed Faulkner couldn't. As the agreement crumbled under the force of the Ulster Workers' Council strike of 1974, British Prime Minister Harold Wilson erupted in fury, scornfully dismissing unionist grassroots protestors as spongers on British democracy. The effect was the opposite of what he intended. More people came out onto the streets, now wearing sponges on their lapels.

The strains are less dramatic today, but discontent is steadily becoming more pervasive. Protestants supported the Belfast Agreement, but by a narrow margin. Just 36% say in a recent poll they would vote 'yes' in a referendum today, although 60% still want the agreement to work.[4] Protestants are much more likely than Catholics to feel 'their' community has done worse than the others: 46% of Protestants say that nationalists benefited more from the Belfast Agreement than unionists, while only 3% of Catholics believe that unionists made most gains.[5] As always in times of trouble, many have found harbour with the Reverend Ian Paisley, who has continued his indefatigable campaign to root out traitors to the unionist cause. He has haunted Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble so successfully that his Democratic Unionist Party is now challenging UUP supremacy. British and Irish governments are braced for a scenario where the DUP and Sinn Féin eventually emerge as Northern Ireland's two largest political parties. Should this happen, a titanic 'battle of the bottom lines' will ensue. The DUP argues it can win changes to the Belfast Agreement to make it more *inclusive* for unionist voters. 'We want changes to the agreement

because we want unionists to be part of the process rather than frozen out', says DUP MP Gregory Campbell.[6] Paul Bew, however, believes the DUP will never be able to make the concessions needed to bring a definitive end to the IRA campaign. Like many unionists, he also has Tony Blair in his sights. He suggests that the British Prime Minister, distracted by the war on Iraq and 'overly deferential' to his Irish counterpart, has lost control of the peace process, with potentially 'fatal consequences'.[7]

Despite the cyclical appearance of Northern Irish politics, a comparison with earlier negotiations shows some things, at least, have changed. In 1992, Conor Cruise O'Brien gave the second lecture in memory of Ian Gow, who resigned from Margaret Thatcher's government over the Anglo-Irish Agreement and was killed by the IRA in 1990. O'Brien saw no prospect for agreement between unionist and nationalist, suggesting the talks of the early nineties were sustained only by each side 'manoeuvring to ensure that the blame for the eventual and inevitable breakdown will rest on the other.' He hoped the breakdown, when it came, would be 'definitive', exposing the fact that agreement was fundamentally impossible and allowing for a security solution imposed 'without undue sensitivity to the views of those who, for whatever reasons, don't want security to be strengthened.' The Union, he concluded, 'can be strengthened in the wake of the failure of the talks, if the Government draws the correct lessons from that failure, and abandons for good a kind of quest for peace which has, as its sole tangible effect, the encouragement of violence.' O'Brien's pessimism was rooted in a belief that few Irish nationalists – north or south of the border – were sincere when they professed that Irish unity can be achieved only with the consent of the majority of the population of Northern Ireland. He argued that there was 'a simple empirical test' by which the sheep can be separated from the goats. 'Find out how a given person stands on Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. Those Articles are a naked claim to territory, irrespective of the wishes of the inhabitants. There is no nonsense, in the wording of the Articles, about the consent of the inhabitants. There is not mention of any inhabitants. It is all about territory and jurisdiction. The territory is ours, because we say it is and we must have it.'[8]

In 1998, O'Brien's test was passed. The Republic of Ireland amended its constitution to recognise that 'a united Ireland shall be brought about only by

peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island.'[9] The 2001 Northern Ireland census, however, has shown little prospect of a Catholic majority emerging, at least in the medium term.[10] This is supported by a long series of opinion polls, showing solid backing for the Union.[11] The vast majority of Catholics accept this outcome. When asked how they would feel if the majority of people in Northern Ireland *never* voted to become part of a united Ireland, only 2% say they would 'find this almost impossible to accept.'[12] In response, even those Protestants who dislike the Belfast Agreement increasingly accept that power must be shared with Catholics, and that there will be some role for the Republic in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the fact that the structural issues are largely settled has allowed a host of emotional issues to come to the fore – which flags to fly and when; where Orangemen can march; and what the police service should be called. Even the dispute over decommissioning of weapons has symbolic overtones. The IRA would prefer to surrender arms in secret; unionists would like a public demonstration that the armed struggle is over. These issues are serious and cause real pain. But they are of a different order from those that divided Northern Ireland even 10 years ago.

In this essay, we do not try to predict whether Stormont, Northern Ireland's on-off parliament, will survive or fall; victim of either massive unionist revolt or the catastrophe of a return to republican violence. Progress, stalemate and disaster remain plausible outcomes, as do various combinations of the three. Neither do we attempt to discuss what tactics unionists might use to complete, resist or improve the emerging settlement. We avoid all discussion of the pros and cons of the Belfast Agreement or any agreements that may replace or supplement it. Even if the peace process fails, we do not believe – and certainly do not hope, as O'Brien did in 1992 – that its failure will be 'definitive'. Many obstacles to agreement have been removed. Eventually, the parties will return to the table to discuss the same issues, with the same palette of solutions in front of them. Instead, we take Miyamoto Musashi's advice that 'In strategy it is important to see distant things as if they were close and to take a distanced view of close things.'[13] Our starting point is that unionists must face this confusing moment in history by focusing on the future, without denying the past or ignoring the complexity of the present. Although they need a hard headed plan to deal with the short-term, they must set this within a more far-

sighted vision. We therefore try to rise above the day-to-day politicking – where the endgame is continually heralded but never played – to ask what if? What if the siege really is being lifted? What if a long bitter war is slowly giving way to a long uneasy peace? What should unionists do then?

Two: Learning to Win

The 'what if?' question is important for unionists for a very simple reason. They have the greatest incentive to show how successfully Northern Ireland, as presently constituted, can meet the needs of its citizens. As David Trimble put it, 'It is not in our interest for Northern Ireland to appear to be a failed political entity, or something that does not work.'[14] Devolution, meanwhile, places significant responsibility for achieving success back into Northern Irish hands. This raises questions about whether the unionists have sufficient appetite to rise to these challenges. According to Henry MacDonald, 'The only way the Union will die in Northern Ireland is if the unionists kill it.' David Ervine, who leads the Progressive Unionist Party which is linked to the Ulster Volunteer Force, agrees. 'Unionism's own inadequacy could be its downfall,' he argues. 'That and refusing to believe in its own power and the legitimacy of its own arguments. We almost prefer to function with the siege mentality, allowing ourselves to be forced into a siege, rather than standing proudly and sensibly.'

Looking forward, Northern Ireland faces practical dangers. What if, given its renewed autonomy, it performs poorly in comparison with its neighbours? Within limits, modern electorates are 'consumers' of political systems, rejecting those that fail to meet expectations. Voters in Northern Ireland will be less resistant to radical change if the status quo is failing to meet their expectations. But there are also psychological factors in play. Some commentators suggest that unionists are already talking themselves into defeat, giving up on the Union even while it still seems objectively viable. On the ground some unionists talk fatalistically about a one-way road to a united Ireland. They contrast strong Catholic communities with weak Protestant ones; and compare fragmented and ineffective unionist political parties with cohesive and professional nationalist organisations. Such defeatism has the potential to be self-fulfilling. Young Protestants may choose to leave the country in growing numbers. Although their elders are unlikely to follow, the latter could withdraw psychologically,

demonstrating an unwillingness to participate or a refusal to vote. Mark Langhammer captured the thoughts of many when he suggested 'The middle class got out of political life a long time ago. They went off to play golf in 1969 and they haven't come back since.'[15]

The extent of devolution throughout the UK is a further complicating factor. Throughout the troubles, Stormont was a chip to be pushed around various negotiations, a 'special arrangement' to suit Northern Ireland's unique situation. In the event, the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales both produced functioning governments before the Stormont Executive finally opened for business. The implication of these constitutional changes is hard to fathom, but their importance for Northern Ireland should not be underestimated. According to Sean O'Callaghan, republican analysis assumes Scotland will eventually achieve independence, or something close to it, and that this will help lever Northern Ireland away from the remnants of the Union. 'If Scotland were to become independent, the position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom would undoubtedly be different,' O'Callaghan warns. 'The emotional loyalty to the Union might come under huge strain and this is one of the main reasons why Gerry Adams has pushed ahead with the peace process.'[16] Arthur Aughey believes such concerns are overblown. 'Ron Davies's belief that devolution is a process not an event does not imply (as he did not) the disintegration of Britishness,' he argues. Aughey accepts, however, that the nature of the Union is shifting – something Northern Ireland can contribute to, but not control. 'Process can mean something less drastic, namely that devolution can change perceptions and that these changed perceptions can influence the culture of administration throughout the United Kingdom and not just in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It will affect the whole association.'[17]

John Hume is said to have reserved his harshest criticism for those who hoard grievance instead of working to transform their situation.[18] The lesson is relevant to unionists today. The challenge they face is illuminated by a simple thought experiment. Imagine a referendum is to be held in 2020, where voters will be asked whether they wish Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom or to form part of a united Ireland. By some quirk of demographics, it is known that the referendum electorate will be split precisely between Protestants and

Catholics. To a man and woman, there will be as many voters who might be expected to vote for the Union as against it. In a sense, the strange mathematics of this *parity referendum* renders traditional allegiances irrelevant. What will be decisive will be those who, for whatever reason, choose not to pass through their 'home' lobby. In theory, only one defection would be needed to swing the vote; one Protestant voting for a united Ireland, one Catholic voting for the status quo. In practice, apathy could be just as important as apostasy; the absent and swing voter both up for grabs. Voters would judge the Union on how successfully it performs against possible alternatives. They would be swayed by the relative performance of leaders associated with the unionist and nationalist causes. The attractiveness of Great Britain and the Republic as partners would also be compared. In the privacy of the voting booth, a number of questions would come into play but, as in peacetime elections across the world, 'what's in it for me and my family?' would probably be dominant. And on the sofa at home, when deciding whether to go out and vote, something even more basic: 'do I really care?'

It is fairly easy to predict how nationalists might start to build their case. They would invest considerable energy in developing political leaders who became widely recognised, however grudgingly, as effective, imaginative and fair. They would foster north–south ties, building not just cold and superficial formal links, but rich and dense cross-border networks, networks able to make a demonstrable contribution to Northern Ireland's quality of life. They would identify the enormous importance of boosting Catholic pride, self-reliance and self-confidence, by encouraging investment in education and enterprise, while actively seeking to draw in those otherwise at the margins. A successful community will gain momentum, their analysts would tell them, have high levels of engagement, and become used to winning arguments. It will also come out to vote. They would devote resources to research, analysis and communication, helping them listen to voters from both sides, understand their concerns, and tailor both policies and messages accordingly. They would adopt a tone that was increasingly confident; decreasingly strident and shrill. Finally, they would recognise the necessity of discipline, effective organisation and adequate resources. They would, after all, be embarking on a long journey, setting their sights on a distant goal.

Unionists could respond in kind – developing their own leaders, networks, and communities – and opening up a productive competition between two visions of the future. Alternatively, they could adopt a defensive, negative strategy, placing their hopes in cleverly proving that the case being built by nationalists was an illusion, a sham. Nationalist politicians only *seem* effective, imaginative and fair, they could argue. North–south networks are not all they are made out to be. Catholics might appear to be doing well, but this has been achieved not by fair means, but by foul. Voters should not be conned by the nationalist parties. Beneath the smooth nationalist exterior, something nasty lurks. Their discipline and organisation hark back to a paramilitary structure, and before that to a monolithic church. The bottom line: keep what you have, however imperfect, rather than risk seeking more.

In reality, of course, unionists do not face a 'parity referendum'. If the principle of consent is ever tested, the numbers suggest they will easily win. But this does not make defensiveness a more appealing strategy. While nationalists increasingly compete as if they believe victory will eventually be theirs, unionists look as if they are staving off the inevitable, *despite* their inbuilt advantage. In this way they are handing a huge favour to their opponents. With only minimal effort, nationalists keep unionists pushed onto the back foot, their energy dissipated on rearguard actions with little strategic significance. In the jargon of the military, nationalists have infiltrated the unionist 'decision-making cycle'.[19] They understand how unionists are thinking, can predict how they will react, and anticipate them with ease. Most damagingly, they use this knowledge to seize the initiative: momentum is always on their side. They lure unionists into fights, like Drumcree or Holy Cross, that can never be won. In negotiations, they always seem one step ahead. They even appear to be winning when they are not doing anything. It is a marked switch of position from only ten years ago, when a Northern Ireland minister wrote: 'I believe the IRA (Sinn Féin) now know they cannot win but they do not know how to lose.'[20] Today, a reverse dilemma applies to unionists. They suspect they have not lost. But they are not sure what it means to win.

Three: Facing the Dilemma

Unionist strategy is weak because unionists have yet to react fully to changing circumstances. Before 1994 they were at war. In the future, they hope to live in peace. For the moment, they are stuck somewhere in between. But even a partial peace needs a different strategy from a war. Typically, war tends towards an end point – victory for one side, defeat for the other. Peace is different. It isn't meant to stop, but to deepen. So what, in peace time, are you supposed to do about your adversaries? The easy answer is to say: trust them. But what if they're not trustworthy? What if they may be tempted to damage your interests by clandestine means? A classic strategic puzzle describes precisely this situation. Its solution sheds light on steps unionists might take to seize back the initiative, build a more robust strategy, and start making sustainable improvements to their position.

In a Prisoner's Dilemma, two players are locked together in a game where, on each move, they choose either to 'cooperate' with each other or to 'defect' – a selfish and hostile act. If one defects and the other cooperates, then the former is highly rewarded and the latter gets nothing (the sucker's payoff). If both defect, stalemate results and each receives very little (which is better than nothing). If both cooperate, they each receive a middle reward. 'Although there is mutual benefit if you both cooperate,' Robert Axelrod explains in his account of the game, 'as an individual player, it is rational for you to defect if you think the other player will cooperate (you get a high reward) and to defect if you think the other player will defect (you at least get a low reward). That is the dilemma.'[21] Mapping Northern Ireland's politics onto the Prisoner's Dilemma is straightforward. The big prize for unionists is the unqualified and unchallenged maintenance of the Union; for nationalists, the chance to move unchallenged to a similarly unqualified united Ireland. But these outcomes are mutually exclusive and can be achieved only if one side pursues its goal ruthlessly while the other acquiesces totally, receiving only the sucker's payoff. When both sides pursue their objective without regard for the other, stalemate ensues and both sides suffer. Cooperation may seem a good idea to outsiders, but is harder to achieve when actually playing the game. Each side is anxious about being exploited if the other seems strong, and faces the temptation to take unilateral advantage if the other seems weak.

The Prisoner's Dilemma is common in real life, so in the early 1980s Axelrod tried to find out how one should react when faced with an ambiguous adversary. His methodology was simple. He invited all-comers to write a computer programme describing the best strategy they could devise for playing the game.[22] He then ran a series of tournaments where each strategy was played a great number of times against each of the others. Surprisingly, one of the simplest strategies emerged victorious in each tournament and has proved almost impossible to improve since. Called TIT FOR TAT, it is based on the principle of reciprocity. TIT FOR TAT is, initially at least, a 'nice' rule, in that it cooperates on the first move and continues to do so if its opponent is also nice. TIT FOR TAT balances its kindly qualities with a policy of immediate 'retaliation', responding with an ongoing string of defections once its opponent has defected for the first time. Crucially, TIT FOR TAT is equally swift at 'forgiveness'. As soon as its opponent apologises by resuming cooperation, it cooperates in return. 'While it pays to be nice, it also pays to be retaliatory,' Axelrod comments. TIT FOR TAT combines these desirable properties. It is nice, forgiving, and retaliatory; it is never the first to defect; it forgives an isolated defection after a single response; but it is always incited by a defection no matter how good the interaction has been so far.' Less successful strategies were either too nasty, too easy to exploit, or too slow to forgive. Strategies, of whatever sophistication, that relied on predicting an opponent's move were also unsuccessful. This included 'sneaky' strategies that defected only occasionally, when they believed they could extract maximum gain for minimum pain. 'When a single defection can set off a long string of recriminations and counter-recriminations, both sides suffer ... Without their realizing it, many [sneaky] rules actually wound up punishing themselves.'

The success of TIT FOR TAT provides a number of illuminating lessons for unionist strategists. The first lesson is to *enlarge the shadow of the future*. 'What makes it possible for cooperation to emerge,' writes Axelrod, 'is the fact that players might meet again. This possibility means that the choices made today not only determine the outcome of this move, but can also influence the later choice of players. The future can therefore cast a shadow back upon the present and thereby affect the current situation.' In Northern Ireland, the shadow of the future is strengthened by the permanence demography gives to the constitutional position. It also relies on both communities accepting, at a profound level, that the other is here to stay. It is undermined by fantasies of

resettlement (in the 1980s, Sinn Féin recommended relocation grants for those unable to accept a united Ireland) and of flight (Conor Cruise O'Brien suggests that 'almost subliminally' what he calls the 'Scottish option' is creeping up on the unionist middle classes).[23] Conversion fantasies are more subtle, but just as dangerous. Gerry Adams, for example, has suggested loyalists should stop 'trying to work out some kind of obscure notion of Irish Protestant culture' and embrace Irishness.[24] Some unionists believe nationalists will change their minds, given a little more effective persuasion. Such notions should be subverted by a simple restatement of the truth. People cannot be reprogrammed or driven away. There are two communities: a large Protestant one; and a Catholic one only slightly smaller. Both are staying put. The defeat of one by the other is neither possible nor desirable. Northern Ireland's dilemma has no end point. The two communities must continue to live together, even though this is unlikely ever to *feel* perfectly comfortable for either side.

The second lesson is a direct consequence of the first: *keep friends close, enemies closer.* Inside the system, the logic of cooperation is strong and will tend to overwhelm and regulate destructive elements. Hunger striker Bobby Sands ran in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-election to intensify conflict and foment unrest. But his actions only served to draw Sinn Féin into 'normal' politics with unforeseen speed. 'Within one year of the hunger strikes ending,' recalls Mitchel McLaughlin, 'the party was contesting elections. Martin McGuinness was the Sinn Féin candidate from Derry and I was his election agent – neither of us had ever voted in our lives.'[25] Importantly, it is not *friendly* contact that is important, but *any* contact. The Belfast Agreement was signed even though direct dialogue between Sinn Féin and the UUP was confined to an 'occasional brief exchange in the toilets.'[26] Progress towards peace, meanwhile, has been made harder by the tiresome pretence that the IRA is not a direct part of the negotiations.[27] As Paul Bew puts it, 'The IRA has not signed up to the Good Friday Agreement and that is the key to the problem.'[28] Within the system, you do not have to like your enemies, simply be prepared to deal with them. This lesson is especially important for the debate on policing. However painful the changes to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, unionist strategists should focus on an overriding goal: the social obligation of all citizens to bear responsibility for Northern Ireland's policing. Without a state monopoly of policing, the state can establish no monopoly of force. Without a monopoly of force, its legitimacy

is always in question. Again the logic is simple: bind people into the system and the system becomes stronger as a result.

The third lesson is *judge actions, not words*. TIT FOR TAT employs true reciprocicity, a strategy that blends 'niceness', 'retaliation' and 'forgiveness' in a straightforward, successful and comprehensible way. The successful operation of TIT FOR TAT relies on one good habit above all: the ability to respond to your opponent's actions, not his words or, still worse, your suspicion as to what his underlying motivations may be. Words not backed by actions are meaningless, not least because players who judge words are as likely to judge too pessimistically as too optimistically ('unlike chess, in the Prisoner's Dilemma, it is not safe to assume the other players are out to get you,' Axelrod warns). Opponents frequently speak in code and may well be tempted to lie, but actions speak for themselves and cannot be deceiving. A punishment beating is an unmistakable breach of social norms, an *unquestionable* breach of cooperation, an action that drowns out all weaselling to the contrary. An arms cache deserves, as counter-intuitive as it may sound, to be taken somewhat less seriously than breaches of the ceasefire, however minor. Although illegal, it holds only the *potential* for violence, a promise that may or may not be fulfilled; while arms put 'beyond use' can easily be replaced. Finally, the *suspicion* that an ex-terrorist has not truly repented is a dangerous distraction. The strategist must face a hard truth: an opponent is not what he was, or what he thinks, but what he does.[29]

The fourth lesson follows from the third: *avoid envy* at all costs. The Prisoner's Dilemma is not a zero-sum game, where one player's gain is necessarily the other's loss. To the contrary, if total victory for one side is impossible, there are only two outcomes: both sides do well, or both sides do poorly. As a result, comparisons are deceptive. 'Asking how well you are doing compared to how well the other player is doing is not a good standard unless your goal is to destroy the other player,' Axelrod advises. Most commentators will recognise how corrosive a force envy currently is in the unionist body politic. Working class Protestants contrast their plight with the supposed success of their Catholic neighbours. Protestant community leaders are convinced that nationalist groups have preferential access to funds. Unionist politicians treat every nationalist (let alone republican) gain as a unionist loss, and are convinced their opponents have a whole range of illicit advantages. But envy makes sense only if unionists

wish to follow Gore Vidal's advice: 'It's not enough to succeed. Others must fail.'[30] If not, they need to insist that the fate of unionist causes and of Protestant communities has *absolute* rather than relative importance. The relevant question is not 'are we doing better than the other side?' but 'could we be doing better than we are now?'

The final lesson underscores all the others. It is to transform the game by *increasing the rewards* for cooperation. You *enlarge the shadow of the future* by creating an expectation that the future will be better than the present. Success helps keep both *friends and enemies close* and encourages all participants to judge the system through *actions rather than words*. And the more people are winning, the easier it becomes to *avoid envy*. Drawing on this lesson, nationalist strategists are attempting to transcend the situation Northern Ireland finds itself in by making the lure of a united Ireland ever more irresistible. The injunction to *increase rewards* should impel unionists to attempt a similar transformation. How attractive – not in prospect, but in fact – can they make the Union? It is helpful to keep in mind the 'parity referendum'. Are unionists relying on in-built advantage? Or are they winning arguments through proof rather than assertion? In other words, are they *really* winning?

Four: Creative Battlegrounds

The Prisoner's Dilemma is a complex situation in which one encounters an unpredictable blend of competition and cooperation. It is hard to tell whether an adversary is out to get you or is prepared to work with you for mutual benefit. By employing TIT FOR TAT, a player signals a willingness to engage, but not to be exploited. Clarity gives the player a significant measure of control. Work with me and we'll achieve a productive relationship. Cross me and we'll both suffer the consequences. Such situations are familiar in real life, though they are seldom so neatly defined. Rules and rewards are less clearly specified. There are also usually more than two players. Even when there *are* two main sides, as in Northern Ireland, there is also a middle group with shifting allegiances. Neither is the position of either side monolithic. Unionists clash bitterly with other unionists; nationalists with other nationalists. The competition is many-against-many, not one-on-one. As it turns out, TIT FOR TAT flourishes in these conditions, too. In a tournament where strategies that are successful in one round increase

their representation in the next, TIT FOR TAT tends to propagate more quickly than any other rule. TIT FOR TAT can thrive even when the vast majority of rules it meets are uncooperative. By forming a cluster with friendly players and punishing unfriendly ones, it succeeds when times are bad (it does better when times are good, of course). Even cooperative rules with strategies slightly less effective than TIT FOR TAT tend to perform above average. They draw energy from within the cluster, where the climate is benign, and this sustains them outside it, even when the weather gets chilly.

We can already see these clusters starting their work in Northern Ireland. Observers have been surprised by the extent to which 'hardliners' have been prepared to engage in the political process. According to Fionnuala O'Connor, it is Sinn Féin and the DUP that have made the greatest strides towards accommodation, even if she believes this has involved 'dissembling and fudging on a heroic scale to cover their tracks.'[31] Margery McMahon makes a similar point. Politics is becoming more professional. 'Northern Ireland's politicians are now acutely aware that just as they were voted in, so they can just as quickly be voted out. This has resulted in a moderating, not of their political viewpoints, but of how they present them.'[32] Italy experienced a comparable process of ideological *domestication* when it devolved power to the regions. New legislators originally saw politics as a zero-sum game, and competed fiercely with ideological opponents. Over twenty years, however, they became more tolerant of each other and notably less partisan than their electorates. 'The accumulation of evidence is overwhelming,' writes Robert Putnam. 'The first two decades of the regional experiment witnessed a dramatic change in political climate and culture, a trend away from ideological conflict toward collaboration, from extremism toward moderation, from dogmatism toward tolerance, from abstract doctrine toward practical management, from interest articulation toward interest aggregation, from radical social reform toward "good government".'[33] This was not just a matter of a new generation of politicians entering the parliament. The effect was strongest among those who were initially the most partisan, with these erstwhile hardliners likely to have the longest parliamentary careers.

In many ways, the domestication of politicians is a good thing. Although opponents are still opponents, the nature of competition has shifted, allowing more productive outcomes for all sides. Problems can result, however, if leaders

grow too detached from their electoral base. For this reason, Sinn Féin has emphasised that it is involved in a double negotiation – with its political opponents on the one hand, and with its supporters on the other. 'For the IRA's position to have been released or made public without its grassroots having had the opportunity to engage ... would have been a total disaster,' Gerry Adams has argued.[34] Unionists may have been slower to see the dangers, but both the UUP and DUP now realise there is no point keeping enemies close, if friends become detached. Unionists have thus made more efforts to dictate the pace of the political process, in part to seize the initiative from republicans, but also to make sure they do not travel too far ahead of their own supporters. 'Lead from the front, but not too far in front,' is good advice at any time; it may be even more relevant when 'normal' political institutions are suspended. A parliament is not just an interface between opposing political forces. It is a public space, where citizens can review the performance of their elected representatives. Northern Ireland's assembly currently spends most of its time suspended, and much of the business of politics is thus done in secret. Elections therefore become curious affairs, as voters make judgements based on how they *suspect* their politicians have performed. They are forced to vote not on actions, but on words.

This underlines the lasting significance of democracy for unionists. Devolution, unsurprisingly, is popular with voters, at least in principle. 65% want the Assembly to have the most influence over the way Northern Ireland is run, compared to only 17% who favour a leading role for Westminster. Protestants, in particular, see strong self-government as an important milestone on their political journey. When asked to consider their favoured long-term constitutional solution, they favour a powerful assembly with tax-raising powers (47%) over one with more limited powers (18%).[35] The electorate may be generally sceptical about what the Assembly has achieved *so far*, but devolution's potential is clear. Democracy is designed to reconcile competing interests. Although Westminster performs this function for the United Kingdom as a whole, it cannot respond to Northern Ireland's complex situation. But we can and should expect Stormont to do more than provide regulation at the prosaic level of new legislation. If it works effectively, the parliament will also regulate the relationship between political opponents, while providing a more healthy and transparent interface between politician and citizen. Unionists should not only make full use of the

powers that form a current part of devolution, but they should push for greater transfer of powers from Westminster and argue for decentralisation within Northern Ireland. This may mean reducing the number of local councils to a handful, but vastly increasing their powers.[36] Local services should be controlled at a local level, if democracy is to be best served. However, beyond getting structures right, unionists face a deeper question. Will new structures deliver? And how can they increase the chances they do?

For guidance, we can return to Robert Putnam's landmark study of regional government in Italy.[37] It asked why some regions have become legislative pioneers, able to drive renewal and build support among voters, while others are incompetent, corrupt and despised by the people they should serve. The answer is consistent with the lessons of the Prisoner's Dilemma. Successful regional government has emerged in regions that display the civic values of 'co-operation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement and social well-being.' Regional government has failed where *un*civic values predominate: 'defection, distrust, shirking, exploitation, isolation, disorder, and stagnation.' The strength of the association is mesmerising, Putnam says. 'The regions characterized by civic involvement in the late twentieth century are almost precisely the same regions where co-operatives and cultural associations and mutual aid societies were most abundant in the nineteenth century, and where neighbourhood associations and religious confraternities and guilds had contributed to the flourishing communal republics of the twelfth century. And although these civic regions were not especially advanced economically a century ago, they have steadily outpaced the less civic regions both in economic performance and (at least since the advent of regional government) in quality of government.' In successful regions, the interface between electorate and politician was also more productive. Voters contacted their representatives on relatively few occasions, but when they did, they generally wanted to talk about policy issues. Poorly functioning regions saw more frequent, but more futile contact. Voters were generally looking for favours of one kind or another, trying to access public sector funds and jobs, or hoping to secure advantageous decisions.

Putnam provides empirical evidence for some important truths about democracies. Political, economic and social institutions have either debilitating or invigorating effects on each other, forming vicious or virtuous spirals of failure or success.[38]

Beneath them, however, lies something more profound. Political renewal is about more than institutions. It involves drawing on deeply held cultural values, allowing the past to become a source of inspiration rather than a drag on change. Both Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair built disruptive, and highly effective, political movements by challenging expectations while appealing to values. 'The essence of New Labour is to strip away all the outdated dogma and doctrine, the "hallowed positions", and return to first principles,' Blair has said. 'Then we ask: if these are our values, what is their proper translation into practice for today's world? That is the question each generation of Labour members should ask, and answer in a different way.'[39] Today's unionists face a similar challenge. On the one hand, they can look back to an entrepreneurial, iconoclastic and vibrant tradition. On the other, they suspect that tradition is being eclipsed. They remember Ulster as home to a proud, booming and outward-looking economy, a time when Belfast was described as 'the pulsing heart of a mighty commercial organisation, whose vitality is ever augmenting, and whose influence is already world wide.'[40] They also recall the Ulster Covenanters, who built a movement on a mixture of pragmatism, principle and a restatement of the proper relationship between citizen and state, resisting political developments they saw as 'subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship and perilous to the unity of Empire.'[41] Perhaps most strongly of all, they honour sacrifice in wars fought for the United Kingdom, especially at the Battle of the Somme, where in the first two days of the war 5500 men from 36th (Ulster) Division were killed or wounded.[42] A letter home from Private Herbert Beattie catches something of the scale of the suffering at the time: 'Mother we were tramping over the dead ... Mother if God spares me to get home safe I will have something awful to tell you. If hell is any worse I would not like to go to it.'[43]

The devotion to duty was seen again during the troubles, where Northern Ireland's policemen lived under constant threat, regarded as 'legitimate targets' by republican paramilitaries. But the campaign of terror had a profound effect on Protestant communities. It corroded civic values and rewarded *un*civic ones. It attacked so-called 'instruments of the state', degraded economic structures, and disrupted associational life. 'In ways which can only be experienced from within a community,' John Dunlop reminds us, 'it is difficult to imagine how every murder shook the Protestant community like a tremor.'[44] Unionists still

feel these tremors, which condition the way they react to both opportunities and threats. Reconstruction, however, allows them to celebrate their survival and honour the sacrifices that have been made. But rebuilding is a demanding process, requiring them to question fundamental assumptions and explain anew how their values inform what they are trying to achieve. As they reach back into their traditions, they must speak more forcefully of liberty, but with a new understanding of the obligations liberty brings. They have to return to the idea of a covenant between government and citizen, providing clear roles for state, market and civil society. And they need to become, once again, an outward-looking, enterprising people – tapping into the wealth of opportunity that greater openness brings.

Five: Right or Wrong?

'The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering,' the Belfast Agreement said. 'We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.'[45] So what does this fresh start mean? In practice, a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland – a draft version of which has been prepared and circulated by the new Human Rights Commission. The bill will distinguish Northern Ireland's legal system from that of the UK, aligning it with international models such as South Africa, Namibia, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka.[46] According to Chief Commissioner Brice Dickson, the commission aims 'to facilitate and institutionalise change so that never again in this part of the world will there be the terrible slaughter and mayhem that we witnessed from 1969 to just recently.' Should unionists welcome these developments? Do they provide a framework for reconstruction, drawing on common values and building dynamic institutions? Will the result be increased liberty and decreased conflict? Unionists have certainly been instructed to answer these questions in the affirmative. Dickson has promoted human rights to them as a way out of their crisis of confidence. He has reminded them of their 'tradition of standing up for the rights of the oppressed and of seeking to curb the excessive powers of the state.' He says he now detects 'a growing confidence in the unionist community that they can re-capture some of the human rights ground which they feel may have

been ceded to others ... The field of human rights is one in which everyone in society should feel free to operate and thrive.'[47]

Despite Dickson's assertion, unionists have had considerable problems thriving in the 'human rights field'. The atmosphere is reportedly 'tense' when unionists meet with the commissioner, while some admit muting their criticism of the draft bill because being 'against rights' makes them an easy target.[48] 'We have spent the last few months drafting a response,' one group comments. 'Whilst we disagree with virtually all of the bill, there is a tendency to seek to find some form of accommodation with the reasoning contained in it. We have not made a virtue of our own philosophical position. We're embarrassed to suggest that a bill of rights should exist to protect fundamental freedoms and, beyond that, it should be a matter for the voters.' This reticence is worrisome. According to the commission, it has chosen to develop the most extensive bill possible under the Belfast Agreement. The bill will sit above other laws, framing the way government is allowed to operate, and providing an authoritative yardstick against which it can be judged. It will be given 'special constitutional status and special procedures for any future amendment so that the rights it protects cannot be chiselled away by future law-makers.'[49] The commission also promises that the bill's impact will be pervasive, making 'a real difference to the lives of everyone in Northern Ireland – young and old, rich and poor, long established and newly arrived.' If unionists can't clearly *identify* with such far-reaching legislation, they risk alienation from political life. Silence therefore should not be an option, they have an obligation to respond. So how should they judge the difference a bill of rights will make to life in Northern Ireland?

Rights have been long protected by British democracy, even if these protections have sometimes been circumvented. Recently, the British government formalised protection for UK citizens by incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law. Northern Ireland's bill is intended to protect 'rights supplementary' to those in the European Convention and to do so in a way that reflects 'the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland'. This guidance has been interpreted generously. The draft bill covers democratic rights; rights concerning identity and communities; the right to equality and non-discrimination; the rights of women; rights to life; freedom from torture, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment; freedom from slavery and freedom from forced labour;

rights in the criminal and administrative justice systems; the rights of victims; rights to family life and private life; the rights of children; education rights; rights to freedom of thought, expression, information and association; language rights; and social, economic and environmental rights. Among many gaps identified in the convention, the commission has focused on equality. It points out 'the absence in the convention of a free-standing provision guaranteeing equality or imposing a positive obligation on the state to redress inequality.' Its bill aims to 'help foster attitudes and mechanisms by which equality can be a reality for everyone.' It even raises the possibility that the bill should *mandate* positive discrimination. This would involve 'laws, policies, programmes or activities' aimed to ensure 'full and effective equality' for an individual or group that is disadvantaged on any ground, such as race or ethnic origin, nationality, colour, gender, marital or family status, residence, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, possession of a criminal conviction, national or social origin, birth, disability, age, parentage, sexual orientation, status as a victim, socio-economic grounds, or any other status.[50]

Despite assertions to the contrary, the commission's approach has little in common with the Protestant rights tradition. This focused on a small set of 'negative' rights, which protects the individual from arbitrary action by the state (confiscation of life, liberty, property, etc.). Modern human rights theory is much more ambitious. Instead of restraining the state, it aims to institutionalise a culture of citizen entitlement and state responsibility. There are a number of problems with this 'activist' approach to rights. The first is *triviality*. Already the commission is finding it hard to distinguish important and unimportant rights abuses (researching the human rights implications of mobile phone masts, for example).[51] The second is an inability to deal with *controversy*. Although the human rights movement seems to be guided by morality, by what is 'right', it falls silent when there is conflict between one right and another. Abortion is a hot potato (rights of the mother versus rights of the unborn child).[52] There are similar difficulties with parades, one of the few areas where Protestants believe their rights are being ignored. Dickson admits the problem. 'We need to accept that there are few absolutes here,' he explains. 'That usually, it is a question of balancing rights one against another.' This leads to the third problem – *obscurity*. According to Dickson, making human rights assessments is a tricky business. There are no correct answers. Anyone who reckons otherwise is

probably 'over-simplifying the problem or refusing to recognise some of its more intricate aspects.'[53] The implications of rights legislation, in other words, are too esoteric for the ordinary citizen. Only the expert can judge which rights matter when, and how much.

Unionists would be well advised to work round these problems if there was firm evidence that the modern rights approach has succeeded in its primary aims – enhancing freedom and reducing conflict. Unfortunately, such evidence has not been provided, and relevant questions remain unanswered. South Africa, Namibia, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka may have more sophisticated *legislation* than the UK, but are their citizens more free than the British as a consequence? And what will be the practical consequences of the bill? What kind of prosecutions are expected? And how many? What will be the cost of new procedures? How is government expected to increase equality? How much will these measures cost? Will they work? What unintended consequences can we expect? The danger is that all the bill will *actually* deliver is more intrusive and cumbersome government, with a corresponding negative impact on autonomy and diversity. Already the Human Rights Commission is working with civil servants to ensure they are adept at 'human rights thinking' and that they are actively promoting a 'human rights culture' across Northern Irish society.[54] It is also fighting hard to be able to mount prosecutions and to increase its influence, saying it would be more 'upbeat' about human rights in Northern Ireland if only 'its own powers and resources were greater than at present.'[55] Precedent suggests, however, that giving the state power to *insist* on equality is likely to have an adverse effect on freedom. By extending political control of the social and economic realm, opportunities for autonomous expression are limited. The interface between citizen and state becomes more complex and tightly regulated. Rather than vibrant and distinctive horizontal networks between citizens, 'rights culture' is likely to encourage a patron/client relation where the citizen expects and the state provides. None of this is in unionists' – or in Northern Ireland's – interest.

Nor should we assume that rights legislation will reduce conflict. Negative rights, traditionally promoted by the Protestant tradition, impose limits on the state and leave the production of benefits to individual citizens. In contrast, the language of positive rights places onerous obligations on the state and runs into the problem of *scarcity*. Given limited resources, whose rights should be funded

first? And how can the government be held accountable if it can't deliver equality, however hard it tries? This takes us back to the roots of Northern Ireland's conflict. The civil rights movement had its origins in competition for state resources. Protestants and Catholics competed for public sector jobs, housing and patronage. Catholics claimed, with considerable justification, that the state was being *unfair* in the way it made allocations. Fair treatment of citizens by the state is, of course, essential. It is valued by both communities, a large majority of whom believe it should be a top priority for the government to treat Catholics and Protestants equally.[56] But an activist interpretation of rights, which extends the scope of government responsibility, can only fuel intercommunal envy, by increasing the scope of what can be competed for, without increasing the rewards on offer. The endpoint is a 'tragedy of the commons', where unproductive competition ends up being damaging to all. 'Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit – in a world that is limited,' writes Garrett Hardin in his classic description of the breakdown of commonly held grazing rights. 'Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to us all.'[57]

In essence, the modern human rights approach invites us to 'graze' on society and to do so without limit. It encourages the consumption, but not the generation, of resources. It tends towards a war of all against all, with the state as patron and the courts as arbiter. These battles are likely to increase dependency, encouraging both communities to become what Michael Gove describes as 'another set of victims without control over their own destiny, without any sense of belief in values bigger than themselves.' Already, some unionist groups are readying themselves to exploit the new legislation, to show how their rights are being trampled, and how much worse Protestants are now treated than Catholics. Nationalists undoubtedly have similar plans. This is not a fresh, but a false start, and unionists must act quickly to suggest another direction.

Six: Order without Authority

For an alternative, we may look to Alexis de Tocqueville's classic account of American democracy in the early nineteenth century. De Tocqueville was struck by the power of association as a driver in American life. 'Wherever at the head

of some new undertaking you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association,' he wrote. Americans showed how important it was that governments should not be 'the only active powers.' Indeed, 'a government can no more be competent to keep alive and to renew the circulation of opinions and feelings among a great people than to manage all the speculations of productive industry. No sooner does a government attempt to go beyond its political sphere and to enter upon this new track than it exercises, even unintentionally, an insupportable tyranny; for a government can only dictate strict rules, the opinions which it favours are rigidly enforced, and it is never easy to discriminate between its advice and its commands.'[58]

In the late twentieth century the world re-learned de Tocqueville's lesson, with a series of dramatic demonstrations of 'the weakness of strong states'.[59] A string of governments that attempted to control all aspects of their citizens' lives collapsed under the weight of their own contradictions. Decentralisation was back in vogue – and rightly so. Distributed systems have a power, resilience and flexibility not offered by central planning. Representational democracy provides an opportunity for those on the periphery to influence decision-making at the core. Free markets offer a decentralised system for producing and exchanging resources. Modern science creates an open system for generating, judging and disseminating knowledge. Civic associations offer a multitude of channels for people to work together for the common good. These systems pay more than lip service to individual freedom, they are able to harness and direct the energy liberty releases. 'They are flexible, which means they can readily adapt to change,' writes Jonathan Rauch. 'Yet by and large they are stable, despite being both flexible and broadly inclusive. And so they are liberal in this important sense: they allow us to be relatively free to be ourselves, each to make the contribution that suits him, with comparatively little risk of upending the whole system.'[60]

This is a different appeal to liberal values than that made by human rights theory. It is also more in tune with Protestant traditions; with Northern Ireland's special circumstances; and with the demands of the modern world. 'The essence of despotism is that there is no appeal, either in practice or in law, against the unchecked power of the master,' Kenneth Minogue writes. 'The sole object of the subjects must be to please. There is no parliament, no opposition, no free

press, no independent judiciary, no private property protected by law from the rapacity of power. In a word, no public voice except that of the despot.'[61] The liberal response to despotism is the diffusion of power, which is why in the Western tradition, rights have been valued because they confine the scope of politics, not because they extend it. This is especially important in a society like Northern Ireland's. Power sharing provides a mechanism by which all communities can participate in government and ensure they are protected from the abuse of state power. By the same means, bargaining for the resources the state provides is institutionalised and controlled.[62] But outside this space, the 'other powers' must be as free as possible to make their diverse contributions. Governments are not required to have all the answers. Indeed, they are expected to let others try and answer first. The proper relationship is best expressed by the saying 'good fences make good neighbours'. Unionists need to be clear about how and where they think these boundaries should be built.

For government, five principles stand out. First, the state should be a refuge of last rather than first resort. Governments are important because they have the power, scale and legitimacy to act when others are unable to. They generate public goods, which can be provided neither by the market nor by civil society. Government must therefore try to act only where this is genuinely the case, and to avoid crowding out initiative from other sectors. Second, when the state does act, it should act fairly. This is the proper sphere of a bill of rights. However, the scope of action should remain a political decision, taken by elected politicians, and subject to change as time goes by. Third, the state should only act when it can demonstrate feasibility and show it has a reasonable chance of achieving the desired result. Feasibility should be reinforced by retrospective evaluations of impact. If the government has not achieved its goals in a particular area in the past, what evidence is there to show it will do so more successfully in the future? Fourth, government should be as prepared to withdraw from a sphere of action as to enter one. Inevitably, bureaucracies attempt to hold onto the budgets they have, while pursuing new pots of money. The result is an accretion of responsibilities, rather than a process of renewal, where old programmes are killed off, even as new responsibilities are taken on. Finally, there should be as close a connection as possible between representation, taxation, and the delivery of services. Currently, most of Northern Ireland's public money is raised centrally and allocated in a block grant. In the long term, unionists should aim for

devolution of significant tax-collecting powers to ensure a much more direct connection between the revenue government collects, and the services Northern Ireland's citizens receive in return.

We can see the importance of these principles if we turn to the current unhealthy and muddled attempts to manage Northern Ireland's economy. During the troubles, the British government aimed to shield Northern Ireland from economic realities. 'The trade union movement soon nicknamed me the Tory Trot,' recalls Northern Ireland minister Richard Needham. 'My speciality was to reassure them that they would not be decimated by Thatcher.'[63] While Margaret Thatcher's ill-judged flirtation with monetarism caused needless damage to the British economy, her later, more orthodox and successful economic policies had beneficial effects on business. Government interference in the private sector was diminished, while British industries were exposed to the bracing impact of international market forces. It was business as usual in Northern Ireland, however. In relative terms, its manufacturing sector now receives fifty times as much subsidy as English manufacturing, with between a third and a half of manufacturing capital expenditure coming from the public purse during the 1990s (the figure in England was 1% in 1995). Most of this money has been squandered, with Northern Ireland's productivity levels low compared to the rest of the UK, itself not an impressive performer against international benchmarks.[64] Economic development strategies have consistently failed to meet their targets, and attempts to change the relationship between business and government have failed.[65] The Northern Ireland Assembly believes there is 'a significant role for government to promote a dynamic, competitive economy.'[66] This is not borne out by past experience.

The latest fashion is to talk about Northern Ireland's international competitiveness, as if it were engaged in some zero sum game with its neighbours. It is worth being aware of the limits of this formulation.[67] As in the Prisoner's Dilemma, we are talking about absolute rather than relative success. 'We must abandon the whole notion of a "competitive nation" as a term having much meaning for economic prosperity,' writes Michael Porter. 'The principal economic goal of a nation is to produce a high and rising standard of living for its citizens. The ability to do so depends not on the amorphous notion of "competitiveness" but on the productivity with which a nation's resources (labour and capital) are

employed … The only meaningful concept of competitiveness at the national level is productivity.' Productivity is a standard that captures absolute rather than relative success. Productivity improvements require a process of constant renewal: relentless attempts to improve the efficiency of existing businesses, to close down failing businesses, and to enter new markets. The focus is on increasing *individual* contribution to the production, as well as the consumption, of resources; and on autonomy and diversity as drivers of innovation. However, this is also a *social* process. As Porter points out, geographical clusters are seen in all economies as firms form dense networks (think Silicon Valley), drawing on a common reserve of knowledge and expertise. The effect is similar to that found in the Prisoner's Dilemma, where cooperation emerges in an essentially competitive environment. 'Once a cluster forms, the whole group of industries becomes mutually supporting. Benefits flow forward, backward, and horizontally … Information flows freely and innovations diffuse rapidly through the conduits of suppliers or customers who have contact with multiple competitors. Interconnections within the cluster, often unanticipated, lead to the perception of new ways of competing and entirely new opportunities …The cluster of competitive industries becomes more than the sum of its parts.'[68]

A focus on productivity should not encourage government into a frenzied attempt to push the economy towards knowledge-intensive sectors. Creating low-paid jobs may be as important as creating high-paid ones, if they go to people who would otherwise not be working. Low-tech businesses can make as great a contribution to economic growth as high-tech ones, if they are dynamic and productive when compared to their competitors. Nor does it mean that government should attempt to 'pick winners'. There is very little evidence that governments can create clusters of innovation artificially.[69] The De Lorean fiasco, where the government lost £84m trying to build a Northern Irish car industry, is a salutary lesson.[70] Returning to our principles for government, we see that *fairness* is the best guide for intervention. Within limits, the government can help improve the environment in which *all* businesses operate, but it should not try to help a chosen few. The first step is to *do no harm*. This means stopping subsidies. It means cutting unnecessary regulation, and making essential regulation easier to implement and enforce. It also means tackling the problem of competition for talent, whereby a bloated public sector damages business by acting as 'employer of choice' for Northern Ireland's brightest people.[71] There

are also a limited number of positive interventions, which most economists agree are likely to generate significant public goods. Investment in education and judicious expenditure on infrastructure and research provide benefits for all businesses, while having wider social impact as well.

By this kind of action, the government contributes to a system quite different from the commons Hardin believed would tragically fail. Instead of competing rights, we have competition for opportunities. Instead of a stampede to consume limited resources, an open system for producing them. The result is what Bertrand Russell called 'order without authority', a system that doesn't produce conflict, but resolves and regulates it.[71] Northern Ireland's problems will not disappear by government decree that everyone must henceforth be equal (and like each other, to boot). But the heat may go out of unproductive conflict as people seek more creative battlegrounds. Free enterprise, protected by constitutional liberties, is one such battleground. It offers the right to *pursue* happiness which, as Michael Oakeshott points out, is somewhat different from the right to *enjoy* it.[73] The virtue of hard work, and its cleansing power, has always been important to the Protestant tradition. Work demands discipline, imagination and skill; it offers dignity and recognition; and it embodies what Hegel described as 'desire restrained and checked, evanescence delayed and postponed.'[74] Most of all, it provides a mechanism for balancing the duties and rights of individuals; matching what each contributes, albeit imperfectly, against what he or she receives in return.

Seven: Power of Networks

'Order without authority', is an equally good motto for civil society. Throughout the troubles, the weakness of Northern Ireland's government has allowed considerable space within which community and voluntary groups can operate. The challenge for the future is whether Northern Ireland will continue to benefit from this dynamic force, or whether more powerful government will diminish people's ability and willingness to work for the common good. According to Kate Fearon, civil society has now entered a 'golden era' based on European Union financing.[75] However, the possibility that civil society will become increasingly parasitic on the state should cause concern. Many groups would not survive without public sector patronage. Others exist for the sole purpose

of influencing government decisions. Clearly, some flow of money from public sector to civil society can be beneficial, as is some flow of ideas from the opposite direction. It is a question of degree. How to distinguish a genuinely beneficial exchange from enervating over-reliance? Again, Northern Ireland's 'particular circumstances' make these problems pressing. Government funding can act as another way of fuelling the politics of envy. Already, every community grant is pored over for signs of bias, with Protestant groups especially prone to believing they are getting a poor deal. There is the additional problem of corruption. In more deprived areas, paramilitary and associated groups have the strongest networks on the ground. These groups now sit in ambiguous territory, both part of the problem and part of the solution. Generous government funding may seem an easy way of bribing them to make a peaceful transformation. The effect could be the opposite.[76]

The Orange Order, the most distinctive Protestant civil society group, faces a different, but related, problem. It sustains a grassroots network without government funding and is at the heart of many Protestant communities, especially in rural areas. It has the potential to be an engine for civil renewal. Currently, however, its relationship with the state is disastrous, as it is drawn into violent conflict with police and security forces when defending its right to march through Catholic neighbourhoods. It also continues to exercise considerable influence over the political process through its historical links with the Ulster Unionist Party.[77] The relationship works to the detriment of both organisations. On the one hand, it blocks the UUP from renewing structures that are poorly suited to contemporary politics. On the other, it distracts the Orange Order from its mission as a cultural and religious organisation. Orangeism is weakening, especially in urban areas, and is losing its ability to bring Protestants of all kinds together. Its long-term future depends on its ability to seize the opportunity for reform and to demonstrate its relevance to a new generation of potential members. Internationally, chapter-based organisations such as the Rotary Club continue to display the power and relevance of the service ethic. They have a convening power which dwarfs that of newer campaigning and voluntary groups, and are able to organise vast projects with global reach.[78] Rotarians, for example, expect to raise US$500 million for the eradication of polio by 2005, their centenary year. They also provide an army of volunteers for national immunisation days around the world.[79] The Orange Order also has a tradition of giving money,

time and talent. By building on it, the Order will assume a more outward-looking stance, emphasise the contribution it can make to society, and provide its members with the positive opportunities for recognition that they desire.

More generally, unionists face the challenge of tackling Protestant disengagement. At the referendum on the Belfast Agreement, the 'yes' vote was boosted by a large number of unionists who had not voted in years and haven't bothered since. At the other end of the spectrum, many anti-agreement unionists may start turning away from politics, unable to accept the compromises their leaders have made. While the detached middle classes drift off to the suburbs, the alienation of working class Protestants is more visible and more frightening. The decline of loyalism into gangsterism, despite the efforts of some of its political representatives, has been a shaming experience for all Protestants. In the past ten years, loyalists have killed more people than republicans.[80] They have had a devastating impact on the communities in which they are the strongest, while the media have given international exposure to their deeds. The cycle of criminality, hopelessness and exclusion is self-destructive and self-perpetuating. The wasted potential, meanwhile, is enormous at the foot of Northern Ireland's society. Only 16% of heads of household in its public housing are working. Just 12% of tenants have an income over £15,000, while 45% have an income of £7,000 or less. Predictably, education and health standards are also low. On its own, state action is unable to solve these problems. Public housing is already in a better condition than Northern Ireland's private rented accommodation, but private tenants perform better on almost all socioeconomic indicators than their public sector counterparts. Renovating bricks and mortar, in other words, is not enough.[81]

On Protestant estates, unionism's problems are seen in microcosm. In East Belfast, for example, community leaders explain how a lack of opportunities is leaching away support for the Belfast Agreement. 'Unionist leaders have found it very difficult to be visionary, to think in terms of the future,' one explains. 'It is very hard to do that when you are essentially defending the status quo. One of the worrying things has been a tendency to resort to the language of victimhood. Sinn Féin has used the "most oppressed people ever" card, but has also told their people to go and get an education and find their way out of it. We just don't have a strategy to get people off their knees.' In Shankhill,

meanwhile, a resident raises a question that goes to the heart of civic renewal: are Protestants prepared to work together for the common good? 'Someone's living in a run-down area and he gets himself a new house. That's his problem sorted. He's not going to stick with the guy down the road still living in the old houses. The Catholic community are sticking together an awful lot more and they're waiting until the very last person gets a brand new house and gets all his grants sorted out.'

As with the market, the state can make the most powerful contribution by concentrating on structural interventions, aimed at increasing opportunities for civic engagement to occur. Graham Gudgin, for example, has suggested that all remaining publicly owned properties should be given to their tenants, with rents converted to mortgages. The construction debt outstanding for these houses is only around £10,000 per house, so mortgage repayments would need to be no higher than rents. 'Gains in house values would accrue to the occupiers and not to the government,' Gudgin writes. 'The new owners would have a greater stake in maintaining peace. People would find that episodes like the Holy Cross school dispute would knock thousands of pounds from the value of nearby houses, and the organisers would be correspondingly less popular. In an unequal and divided society, this would do much more for equality than the ineffective "targeting social need" policies currently used by the government. Hopefully it would also help to restore real peace on some of our more troubled estates.'[82] But creating conditions where change is possible is not the same as making that change occur. Reversing the decay will need a social movement, adventurous and passionate leaders on the ground, and moral and financial support from the rest of the community. Ambitious targets are needed. With 1.7 million people, Northern Ireland is a small society.[83] Rapid progress is therefore possible and should be expected. It also has the highest level of active church membership in the UK and faith-based groups have the potential to be a powerful driver for change.[84] The service ethos must be combined with an entrepreneurial approach. Innovation and hard work are as potent a combination in the social sector as they are in the private.

Ultimately, what unionists should seek is 'a diffusion of authority between past, present and future.'[85] While many societies are greying fast, Northern Ireland is still comparatively young, with nearly one in three of its people under twenty.[86]

However, it too is ageing as birth rates fall. Over the next few decades its school rolls will drop and its labour force will grow. According to David Bloom, this demographic transition offers both peril and promise. For societies who embrace the future, a 'demographic dividend' is on offer. If youthful potential is harnessed, the economy will expand and society be strengthened. But societies that stagnate will face equally serious penalties. Unemployment will rise, as will crime, political unrest and social disintegration.[87] Collecting the dividend means valuing future potential over current certainties. Education must be paid for today to release tomorrow's potential. Existing jobs must be lost in order to create more productive ones in new industries. Old ideas must be challenged by the ideas of a rising generation. Unionists must ask themselves how committed they are to renewal. Do they wish to fight the old battles? Or the new ones? Do they prefer the risks of a long peace? Or the certainty of a long war?

Turning to the future cannot mean burying the past. As John Dunlop warns us, 'It would be callous for a community to travel into the future and leave grieving people behind.'[88] The greatest tribute to those who have suffered, however, is to build on their sacrifices. Since the peace process began, Northern Ireland has had lavished upon it a degree of attention that dwarfs both the size of its population and the seriousness of its problems. Presidents and prime ministers clear diaries for the leaders of parties representing a few hundred thousand people. The media follow the peace process with great respect and curiosity. Martial politicians attract attention as they spar for the cameras, stentorian-voiced. But the world's attention is now moving on and the mundane work of reconstruction must begin.[89] This is not about grandiose gestures, nor sudden cures. It is both more modest and more patient. 'Universal peace is like the desire for immortality: so difficult to achieve that religions promise immortality not before but after death,' Umberto Eco warns us. 'However, a small peace is like the act of a doctor who cures a wound: not a promise of immortality, but at least a way to postpone death.'[90]

Eight: Right *and* Attractive

Modern human rights has much to say about entitlements, but little about the most important imperative for those facing a Prisoner's Dilemma – 'increase rewards'. By focusing on the market and civil society as autonomous systems,

unionists encourage people to contribute more to the common pool of resources than they extract from it. This is the best route out of 'beggar-thy-neighbour' politics. 'Markets, judicial systems, and social capital in communities are all common resources,' writes Marc Smith. 'These resources must be actively reconstructed; where fish will remain in the sea whether they are fished or not, a judicial system or other social contract will not persist without the continued contribution of its participants.'[91] But every system relies on energy from the outside and isolation is certain to transform a common pool into a stagnant pond. Which brings us to one further ingredient: an international perspective.

Unionism has a history of internationalism. There are, after all, Orange Orders in countries as varied in character as the USA and Ghana.[92] In recent years, however, it has tended to retreat into seclusion, even as nationalists built up their international connections. This has had a highly damaging effect on unionist identity and confidence, and it has weakened unionists politically. During the peace negotiations, nationalists have benefited from an imprecise alliance between Sinn Féin, the SDLP, and the Irish and US governments. Unionist negotiators, meanwhile, have gone friendless into the talks. Their relationship with the British government, already frosty, has continued to deteriorate, and they have had little in the way of a global constituency prepared to back up their political demands. Culturally, the situation may be even more damaging. While Northern Ireland's Protestants are not well understood internationally, its Catholics are often idealised, swept along by the enormous power of 'Irishness' around the world. John Dunlop has written of the humiliation people from his church feel at being overlooked. 'Many people in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland feel like an invisible people. It is as if they do not exist. I startled an American participant at a peace conference in Derry when I told her that there were Presbyterians in Ireland and that I was one of them. She did not know that any such people existed.'[93] Unionist isolationism should be a contradiction in terms – an identity based on relations with others does not fit well with a desire to be left alone. It also leaves an open goal for unionism's critics. Tom Nairn, for example, has mocked unionists as 'last-gasp Britons', wilfully blind to the realities of the contemporary UK. 'Ulster Unionism mainly wants the customary ethos of Britishness to stay in place,' he claims. 'Hogwarts-on-Thames, Black Rod, first-past-the-post, Charles the Third – whatever is needed to maintain the Kingdom's last-resort Sovereignty over Northern Ireland, for

their own convenience.'[94]

The UK has undoubtedly changed rapidly in recent years and many traditional British institutions are under attack. The Royal Family is in permanent crisis, the House of Lords seems destined for abolition, and the Church of England faces eventual disestablishment. The British economy, meanwhile, is increasingly open to global competition, while England, at least, has become ethnically diverse, with 9% of its population from ethnic minorities.[95] Human mobility is a natural consequence of open labour markets,' Matthew D'Ancona argues. 'Societies that adapt to this mobility will prosper. Those who don't, won't. Societies that close themselves off from other cultures will wither. Those who don't, won't. In this sense, multiculturalism is not just a sign of the times; it is a sign of progress. It is not a threat to nationhood, but in the modern world, the very essence of nationhood.'[96] The 'very essence of nationhood' has been challenged even more explicitly by European integration, a project rooted in the fear of the continental wars that have repeatedly blighted Europe's nation states. Robert Cooper describes the European Union as 'a highly developed system for mutual interference in each other's domestic affairs, right down to beer and sausages.'[97] Debate on the desirability of this interference has riven the British body politic, condemning the Conservative Party to a purgatorial period of opposition and dividing the Labour government over membership of the Euro. In contrast, the EU has had an invigorating effect on at least some of the UK's component parts. Scotland, Wales and, to a lesser extent, the English regions have seized opportunities to reassert their identity. The debate about devolution has now crossed national borders. At what levels of a complex international political structure should different types of power reside?

The resulting debate about British identity has been characterised by the general absence of Northern Irish voices. The Foreign Policy Centre is a London-based think tank of which the patron is Tony Blair and the director Mark Leonard, of 'cool Britannia' fame.[98] It has been at the centre of exploring questions of national identity, attempting to 'revisit notions of Britishness in the context of debates about devolution, asylum, Europe and Britain's role in the world.' Its recent pamphlet *Reclaiming Britishness*[99] barely mentions Northern Ireland nor, to Arthur Aughey's consternation, does it refer to anything written before 1997. 'In their haste to embrace the future,' he complains, 'they should pause to reflect

on the contributions of the past.'[100] Aughey uses Schopenhauer's fable of the porcupines to illustrate his own understanding of the Union: 'A number of porcupines, Schopenhauer wrote, huddled together for warmth on a cold day but as they pricked one another they were forced to disperse. The cold drove them together again and the process was repeated. After many turns of huddling and dispersing they discovered that a comfortable relationship involved maintaining a little distance from one another. It is only when we discover a moderate distance, Schopenhauer believed, that life becomes tolerable: our mutual needs can be reasonably satisfied and, as far as possible, we can avoid pricking one another.'[101] The fable is powerful. But there is one problem. To the rest of the UK's inhabitants it seems that Northern Ireland's unionists now prefer a chilly distance to exchanging heat and light with their neighbours.

For an economist, free trade between countries is valuable not for exports but for imports. Exports merely pay for imports, for the ability to access a range and quality of products and services that cannot be generated at home. So too with international engagement. Unionists need to venture abroad more, not just to make their voices heard, but to hear what others have to say. There is unlikely to be any area of Northern Ireland life where it is impossible to find a model working more effectively somewhere else in the world. Successful societies are ruthless in their willingness to acquire knowledge from others. They are also professional in the introduction and deployment of new ideas. In contrast, many unionists still cling to amateurism and are suspicious of interference. This is part of what makes them so easy to read for nationalist strategists. They draw on the same stock of home-grown ideas and lack the spark from outside that can transform the ground on which the battle is fought. Notably, unionism's most successful political party of recent years, the DUP, is going through a process of renewal, and has drawn on outside help. Its example should be emulated. In general, unionists need to hold themselves to higher standards and to learn from the best models around the world, if they are to show more effective leadership at home.

Re-engagement is needed at many levels. Unionist MPs have the opportunity to move into the mainstream of UK politics and to start arguing for long-term changes that will strengthen the Union, as well as Northern Ireland's place in it. Relationships must be deepened right across the United Kingdom. It is not

enough to focus on the Scots, considered as favoured cousins. Northern Ireland's unionists may not care much for the English, but with over 80% of the UK's population, they should not be ignored.[102] It is also important to begin to contest the nationalist monopoly over relations with the Republic. The south has finally accepted the legitimacy of the north. Unionists can no longer afford to avoid interaction across what will always be an important border. The European Union is vital too. The European market is reducing the importance of bilateral trade links with the Republic and with Britain, while the UK must soon make a momentous decision about whether to enter the Euro or not. The EU is also in the process of enlargement, bringing low-wage economies into the single market. Low-skilled workers in Northern Ireland are likely to suffer, while EU funding will be directed away from Northern Ireland towards the new entrants. Finally, reform of the common agricultural policy will have a dramatic effect on Northern Ireland's rural economy and is likely to make many farms unviable.

Perhaps the most intriguing prospect is the USA. Historically, Ulster Protestants have had a huge impact on American politics and culture, but recently nationalists have built stronger relationships across the Atlantic. Today, the balance of power may be shifting. In April 2003, just days before Saddam Hussein fell, George Bush arrived in Belfast for a summit with Tony Blair. The trip discomfited nationalist leaders who, opposed to the war with Iraq, agreed to meet the President – but only reluctantly. The SDLP's Mark Durkan admitted 'personal unhappiness' at the situation, while Gerry Adams had to defend himself against charges of anti-Americanism. Mitchel McLaughlin, Sinn Féin's chairman, was booed by anti-war protestors, even while reassuring them that Sinn Féin remained 'at the vanguard of the anti-imperialist struggle'. Other speakers at the same rally called for a boycott of President Bush's visit. 'Don't do it Gerry, don't do it Mark, don't meet the bloodstained murderer in our name,' one speaker said, to cheers from the crowd.[103] In the aftermath, American newspapers from across the political spectrum have become increasingly critical of the republican movement. Although it does not do to overinterpret these developments (for example Conor Cruise O'Brien claims, with scant evidence, that President Bush has told Tony Blair that any further contact with Sinn Féin will be regarded as 'an act hostile to the United States'), the opportunity to look again across the Atlantic is clear.[104] Unionists have much in common with the American ethos and values, making it easier for them to draw on American political, social and

cultural models. They also realise that 'getting out more' brings out the best in unionism rather than the worst. The potential is considerable. For, as Paul Romer argues, it is usually ideas, not objects that countries lack.[105]

Reconciliation is important in Northern Ireland, but so is a return to full-blooded politics. A greater openness will help unionism escape barren ground for more fertile pastures. Unionists must focus on a basic goal – a peaceful, economically prosperous and politically stable Northern Ireland – while drawing on a reservoir of deeply held values. This is not about making unionism more yielding. A 'long peace' will not be an easy peace and unionists will often need to be tough in their projection of power. But 'no' should never be their final answer. Defensiveness is far too predictable a strategy. A genuinely disruptive politics must shape the terrain on which future contests for the Union will be fought, opening up alternatives, rather than shutting them down. It relies on democracy – a Northern Ireland that cannot govern itself will always be a brittle and unstable entity. But a strong state should not be an unlimited one. There is not a government solution for every problem. People need elbow room. There must be space for enterprise, an audience for new voices, room for fresh ideas. Unionism would do well to cultivate a certain restlessness; to allow the questioning of hallowed principles; to let mavericks have their head; to encourage experimentation on a small scale to see what will work on the large. Ultimately, this is a battle for people and not for land. *1066 and All That* tells us that the English Civil War was 'an extremely memorable struggle between the Cavaliers (Wrong but Romantic) and the Roundheads (Right but Repulsive).'[106] In future struggles, unionists need to be both right *and* attractive. For that, a firmer, bolder, more far-sighted unionism will be needed. In a 'long peace', after all, people must *want* the Union for it to survive.

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[22] Players were awarded 3 points for mutual co-operation and 1 point for mutual defection. If one player defected and the other cooperated, they received 5 and 0 points, respectively.

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[27] The comments of the Deputy Irish Prime Minister Mary Harney are relevant: 'We are tired of the myth of Sinn Féin and the IRA being separate. We know the provisional republican movement is one. All of us are tired of reading between the lines. We want the truth. We want clarity. We want results.' Harney on Sinn Fein IRA myth, u.tv, 12 April 2003

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[29] There are many examples of Northern Ireland commentators concentrating on words not actions. In this passage, about Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness, Eric Waugh displays a particular appetite for subtext: 'Mr Blair was the "British" Prime Minister ... Mr Ahern is never held to require a descriptive adjective. In Mr McGuinness' book he is always the Taoiseach ... You may consider this a little thing. I beg to disagree ... the language of Ministers matters ... It is an attitude which, on each occasion it obtrudes, conveys to the mass of the unionist people a standing political insult. "And two fingers to you, by the way."' 'Ex Minister Needs to Move on', Eric Waugh, *Belfast Telegraph*, 29 January 2003

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A Long Peace?
The Future of Unionism in Northern Ireland

"Our starting point is that unionists must face this confusing moment in history by focusing on the future, without denying the past or ignoring the complexity of the present.

Although they need a hard headed plan to deal with the short-term, they must set this within a more far-sighted vision.

We therefore try to rise above the day-to-day politicking – where the endgame is continually heralded but never played – to ask what if?

What if the siege really is being lifted? What if a long bitter war is slowly giving way to a long uneasy peace? What should unionists do then?"

Mick Fealty

Trevor Ringland

David Steven