One consequence of the contemporary peace process in Ireland has been the surfacing from deep within working class loyalism of groupings openly challenging the traditional values of Unionism. For socialists one of the key questions is whether this marks some form of permanent change, or something that will be neutralised by the counter-positions taken by traditional supporters of Unionism. This article argues that while 'new loyalism' may modify the central themes of Unionism, it is unlikely in the foreseeable future to herald a break from them.

Mobilising Ulster Unionism: new directions or old?[1]

by James White McAuley

(C)ultural identity has itself become a term much used and abused. In Ireland, it is thrown around like a frizbee. Terms such as Irish, British; nationalist, Unionist; protestant, catholic. But what does identity actually mean, or, more importantly, are people really so preoccupied with it in Ireland as compared with people in England, France or the US? (Gerald Dawe, *The Rest is History*, 1998: 113-114)

(P)olitical-cultural identities are ways of reading enfolding structural circumstances. These subtle constructs are contested; they express a balance between private thoughts and public truths. The nature of political-cultural identity will be shaped by the exchange of powerful groups, established institutions and the informal resources of everyday life. (P. W. Preston, *Political/Cultural Identity*, 1997: 175)

Introduction

ONE OF THE MORE CONSEQUENTIAL OUTCOMES of the contemporary peace process in Ireland, at least for those viewing through the socialist gaze, has been the increasing fragmentation of, and ruptures within the politics and social relations of Ulster Unionism. Central to this has been the surfacing from deep from within working class loyalism, of groupings openly challenging many of the traditional values and structures of Unionism. At the core of this 'new loyalism' is the mobilisation of support for those politics that have emerged from the loyalist paramilitaries. In

party political terms this has manifested in the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP). Together these organisations have brought about the possibility of fundamental realignments within Unionism and indeed, across politics on the Island.

One of the key questions, therefore, is whether what has been exposed marks some form of permanent change within loyalism. Of equal importance, however, are the counter-positions taken by traditional supporters of Unionism. Sections of Unionist population, most notably those expressing their politics through the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and the United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP), have been far from sedate in their response. They have reacted strongly against those promoting any notion of change within Unionism or seeking an accommodation with Irish nationalism.

Overall, Unionism is clearly subjecting itself to a period of internal renegotiation and evaluation. It is the results of this renegotiation upon which this paper will focus. It will seek to address these issues by considering some of the major perspectives of those supporting and representing new loyalism, and the main political alignments of the PUP and the UDP in the contemporary period. It will highlight important differences between these groupings and other major representatives of loyalism, especially the DUP. It will further consider some of the resulting conflicts and tensions within Unionism and loyalism, particularly in relation to the search for a political settlement. Finally, the paper will consider if new loyalism indicates a progressive turn and an awareness of the differing forces seeking to restructure contemporary Unionism.

Unionist politics and culture

As a starting point I shall consider Ulster Unionism as a social movement. Although the categories are not self-contained, social movements can be defined at the macro, or societal, level of analysis; at the micro, or individual level; and at what has been called the meso level, marking out an intermediate collective level. It is possible to further understand a social movement as an organised effort to promote or resist change. This relies at least in part, on mechanisms of collective action to secure common goals and that are outside of established institutional

mechanisms (cf. della Porta and Diani, 1999: 24–136; Giddens, 1993: 642; Scott, 1990: 6).

Historically, one of the strengths of Ulster Unionism has been its ability to activate and harness collective action across a range of different levels, both legal and illegal, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary. In terms of current mobilisations it is important to identify what Unionists believe about their political identity and the nature of the political structures in Northern Ireland. Further, it is important to highlight how Unionists seek to orientate their political actions to achieving these goals. Hence, it is necessary to outline the range of understandings and values from which Unionists weave their worldview, and that gives expression to their political beliefs.

Unionism developed a political coherence following its collective response to the pressure for Home Rule in the 1880s (cf. Buckland, 1973; Collins, 1994; Jackson, A., 1996). From this time Ulster Unionist political culture, like Irish Nationalist political culture, needs to be understood as the product of a specific constructed history, expressed in both the public and private areas of life, manifest both in everyday life choices and in the great spectacles of organised politics. Much of the resulting Unionist discourse is constructed around negative statements about the existing social and political structure and fears of impending change to that structure.

The resulting political and social alignments and the perceived class position of Protestant workers within the resulting Unionist cross-class alliance, has brought about fundamental cleavages between Left writers concerning Northern Ireland. One of the central differences surrounds whether Protestant workers have any capacity to become a progressive force. Traditional nationalist and anti-imperialist analyses have pointed to the extremely limited, if not absent, potential by Protestant workers to bring about radical change (cf. Bell, 1976, 1984; Farrell, 1983; McCann, 1974). Counter to this, several writers have argued that such perspectives tend to portray Protestant workers as 'dupes', moved around an imperial chessboard by British imperialism. Rather, they argue that Unionist concerns are autonomous (cf. Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, 1979; Bew and Patterson, 1985; Patterson, 1982, 1985; Probert, 1978). Later writings still have developed understandings of the political economy of Unionism and the different class fractions within it. This in turn has led to attempts

by some to restate the material relations of sectarian divisions and that the situation in Northern Ireland can best be understood in colonial and post-colonial terms (cf. Miller, 1998; Ruane and Todd, 1996; Stewart, 1991).

Although the reasons given differ dramatically, and there are considerable arguments about the processes involved, there is now a widespread recognition that the Protestant community is far from a monolith (Miller, 1998: 10). That said, one of the key strengths of Unionism remains its ability to mobilise across an extremely wide social base, incorporating differences of ethnicity, religion, gender, age, occupation, area of residence and, of course, class. The strength of construction of Unionist homogeneity remains especially crucial in a society where political socialisation is confined to ones own community tradition. Such socialisation continues as a process of a growing awareness of the parameters of social difference. This gives a particular group focus to understandings of the reasons for political conflict and social division in Northern Ireland, through the construction of the 'Other'.

These social divisions have manifested in differing ways, most obviously through political violence, but also in widespread physical, cultural and social segregation. As a result each community constructs a series of self generating political values and norms, perpetuated through collective remembering and a series of accumulated myths. This is far from abnormal. The notions of communal memories (cf. Billig, 1996; Jenkins, 1997; Middleton and Edwards, 1990) and the formation of 'imagined communities' (cf. Anderson, 1991; Billig, 1995; Chatterjee, 1996) has been developed elsewhere. In a similar way, communal violence involving groups that define 'differences' between themselves and others in terms of religious, ethnic, racial or religious affiliations is commonplace (cf. Human Rights Watch, 1995; McGarry and O'Leary, 1993). The extent and strength of such processes in Northern Ireland, however, means that the endurance of the traditions and political cultures of both Unionism and Nationalism are constantly reinforced.

A key task for Unionism as a social movement, in mobilising the social forces outlined above, therefore, has been and remains, linking the past with the present directly into an understanding that amplifies social difference. This is possible through the particular patterns of socialisation identified, which rely heavily

on the recollection and commemoration of distinctive social histories (cf. Buckley ed., 1998; Gillespie *et al*, 1992: 135-68; Jarman, 1997; Kirkpatrick, 1992; Taylor, 1989; Wallace, 1995). It has been echoed in the contemporary period by those Unionists that regard the peace process as something that jeopardises their historical position and who are fearful that the central tenets of their way of life are about to change, or be changed, without them being able to mobilise effectively to resist it (cf. Dunn and Morgan, 1994: 20-21; McAuley, 1997a, 1997c, 1998).

Unionism and 'the dangerous Other'

Unionist political and social identities are thus composed of recalled fragments of history, filtered through social and personal experiences into particular narratives, that give coherence and meaning to Unionism in the lives of many individuals. At the populist level this is most often expressed as a sense of 'Britishness'. This construction forms the basis for identifiable shared values that are understood across the group. This in turn provides the basis for the different readings and understandings of history and society that have so divided the island. It is the negotiation of the friction between these competing identities, within particular historical, economic and social locations, which situate groups and individuals. It is the outcome of this that has led to the continuance of the conflict. As Weeks points out in a different context:

> Identities are troubling because they embody so many paradoxes about what we have in common and what separates us; about our sense of self and our recognition of others; about conflicting belongings in a changing history and a complex modern world; and about the possibility of social action in and through our collective identities (1995: 86).

One important consideration, when discussing the possibility of any future political settlement is, therefore, how individuals continue to construct their political identity, how they decide what is of political importance, and what is, and what is not, defined as a political problem. The dominant context for this remains the strength of both Catholic and Protestant group identities, filtered through the experiences of (post)colonialism;

ethnic divisions; religion; economics; (un)employment patterns; strength of community, and their relationship with political violence. These are maintained by communal memories, organised around ideas of communal loss, victory, and the continual construction of the eternally treacherous and untrustworthy nature of the dangerous Other.

These processes are deeply rooted at many levels in Irish society. Tim Pat Coogan in his biography of Eamon De Valera, for example, highlights the centrality of this at the time of partition for the construction of a Unionist politics, that:

> included many strands in its visceral determination not to be subsumed into a Catholic/Nationalist-dominated Ireland: partly that *pietas* of race and place exemplified by the slaughter of Ulster men on the Somme; partly a desire to hold the land and the jobs they guarded against the Catholics; partly stemming from this possession, the fears and hates generated by the processes of colonialization, massacre and counter—massacre from which those possessions evolved. Where this last consideration was concerned, the memories of old bloodshed were increasingly envenomed by the contemporary shedding of new. And, running through all, the excitation of these fears by unscrupulous leaders, to be found at every level of society—political, administrative, police and pulpit, often making use of their Orange and masonic lodges—meant that not only did 'Pope' and 'Devil' become interchangeable terms, but 'Catholic neighbor' and 'dangerous menace' did so also (Coogan, 1996: 237-238).

It was indeed partition that institutionalised many of the political and sectarian relationships of difference in Ireland. As Burton (1978) points out, one result of the political division of the island was that the *laager* mentality of Protestants became more deeply engraved. In particular, the border came to symbolise all the real and supposed peculiarities of the two religious groups. Further, in Northern Ireland, Unionist hegemony was reflected in the State's intransigence and in 'official' policy making (Ditch, 1983). As MacDougall (1996) has illustrated, after partition the Ulster Unionist Party sought to harness social differences and to support the construction of a distinct 'Ulster' identity.

Of major importance, therefore, was not just the construction of Catholics as the dangerous other, and a potential enemy

within the gates, but also that the Unionist position could be supported structurally and especially, if necessary, through the use of state security forces. As Bew *et al.*, 1979) have demonstrated, the central objectives of Unionist leadership following partition were three-fold: to secure the territory from southern control; to secure the greatest degree of autonomy from London; and to maintain class unity within the Unionist 'bloc'. In the early years of the state these objectives became institutionalised, incorporating private violence into the state apparatus in order to deter attack upon it. In response, Bew, *et al.*, (1979: 49) have also argued that at key times the Northern Irish bourgeoisie in an attempt to retain hegemony was forced to concede a portion of class power to the Unionist section of the working class. This was given fuller meaning through the continual development of the notion of the 'enemy within'.

To support these perspectives, Unionists have engaged in a constant process of invention and reinvention of their histories and traditions (cf. English and Walker, 1996; McBride, 1997; Walker, 1996). Like other social movements Ulster Unionism has sought to isolate and reproduce its own symbols, to reinforce its own social and geographical boundaries to emphasise its separateness from Others on the island of Ireland, and to highlight and fortify its links with the rest of the United Kingdom. All of this has given rise to an identifiable set of values and a recognisable worldview. Here, for example, the Belfast poet, Gerald Dawe in recalling his own past, is revealing the experience of many who grew up within the Protestant community:

> As Belfast protestants, not of the churchy or party-political type, Britain existed as England. It was the cyclorama to our lives. We listened to be BBC on the radio, and watched BBC and ITV when the time came. Our house retained the black-out blinds from World War II up to the late 1950s. The bottled sauces and Indian tea, Camp coffee and medicines, brandnamed jumpers and socks, Tate and Lyle Golden Syrup with its sleeping Lion and sleepier slogan, Christmas cake and boxes of biscuits were all British made. My toys, too and comics and footballs.

When it came to school, our history was British and the songs (along with accompanying gestures) which we were taught … were English and Scottish ballads… (1998: 112). Importantly, certainly in the context of this paper, Dawe (1998: 114-119) goes

on to highlight how the experience involved the further construction of contemporary myths.

Much of the core of contemporary Unionist identity still revolves around overlapping notions concerning the construction of the Other. This continues to be a complex process, involving the definition of the enemy within and a recognition of the shifting boundaries between the state and the individual; the redefinition of relationships between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK; between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; and a heightened awareness of the erosion, both feared and real, of Unionism's traditional position.

Underlying this has been consternation at dramatic changes in long standing relationships within Unionism, and the perceived treachery of the British government in shifting Unionism's fundamental positioning points of politics and identity. This has led to increased feelings of disquiet amongst Unionism. Even someone seemingly as sure in his Unionism as the deputy DUP leader, Peter Robinson, can expose an awareness of the complexity of this sense of shifting identities. He clearly did so recently when he described his political identity as follows:

> I'm a Unionist in terms of my politics and Protestant in terms of my beliefs. But from the point of view of being an Ulster Protestant Unionist, there's a complexity to that identity because we are British by way of our nationality Yet we live on the island of Ireland. We are Ulster in terms of our local identity, but as I say, Protestant in terms of our religious beliefs. So it's not a straightforward form of identity at all (cited by Jackson, J., 1994: 14).

How can we understand the importance of these competing identities to the future formations of Unionist politics in Northern Ireland?

Framing contemporary Unionism

As I have suggested elsewhere (McAuley, 1999) the concept of 'frames of meaning' may be useful in understanding the formation of Ulster Unionism. Here, I wish to use and expand upon the concept of 'framing', as developed by several social

movement theorists (cf. Gamson, 1992a, 1992b; Johnston, 1995; Johnston and Klandermas, 1995; Klandermas *et al*., 1988; McAdam and Rucht, 1993; McAdam *et al*., 1996; Snow and Benford, 1988, 1992; Tarrow, 1994), in direct relation to contemporary Unionist thinking.

It was Snow and Benford whom first employed the concept of 'frames of meanings', itself adopted from Goffman (1974) to seek to understand different schemes of interpretation that are collectively constructed through daily interaction. These 'frames' simplify the social world, acting upon differing situations and experiences to guide what is seen as legitimate actions. Importantly, this can be used to explain the ways in which movements organise their discourses and align them with the central values and ideas that they believe to be prevalent in society. It is important to recognise the permanency of some interpretative frames over time, reinforced at key points by their periodic re-invention or re-discovery. In this sense, it is possible to understand a frame as, 'the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action' (McAdam *et al*., 1996: 6).

Some of the literature written within social movement theory in recent years has been openly hostile to Marxism (cf. Hunter, 1995; Sears and Mooers, 1995). However, it is possible that by reading frame alignment theories back through Gramsci we can develop a fuller understanding of the strength and direction of the hegemonic forces at work within Unionism. Unionist hegemony is constructed around a specific ideology of what should be, but it also involves processes whereby notions of what cannot be are also reinforced. In this case of Unionism this most often involves a reinforcement of the central belief that any different form of constitutional arrangement, cannot be contemplated. Most importantly this becomes equated with the 'commonsense' understandings of the world partly outlined above. The ability of key sections of the Unionist leadership to propagate particular ideas, define discourses and especially to frame political issues is central to these processes.

Social movements work in part through a set of interpretative frames, which must undergo a continuous process of re-interpretation, adapting its core aims to contemporary circumstance through the re-working of older ideas. Is it possible therefore, that what is happening within contemporary

Unionism, is that new interpretative frames are contributing to the reconstruction of personal and collective identities? The major representations of Unionism are concentrated into a variety of symbols, icons and slogans. The discourses and symbolism that legitimise Unionism as a defence of identity, and as security against external and internal threat, are understood, accepted and used as orientation points, across Unionism. Beyond that, however, such views have been reinterpreted in a variety of ways.

The next section of this paper will therefore examine the different, although sometimes overlapping, frames that mobilise contemporary Ulster Unionism. These are identified here as, a 're-interpretation of the Unionist frame', a 're-elaboration of the Unionist frame', and an 'adaptation of the Unionist frame'. In reviewing this, the remainder of the paper will assess the different basis for political mobilisation within Unionism and the likelihood of any resulting transformation resulting from it.

Re-interpreting the Unionist frame

Importantly, one of the sources for this transformation has been the reinvestigation of identity from within core sections of loyalism and particularly fractions of the Protestant working class (cf. Belfast Community Economic Conference, 1995; M. Hall, 1994, 1995, 1996; Shankill Think Tank, 1995). At some level, this involves an attempt by sections of the Protestant working class to come to terms with the changing economic position and values within Unionism. What is not clear is whether this has resulted, or is likely to result, in permanent realignments. That such a process may be underway, however, is reflected in the recent political positioning of the UDP and more directly the PUP. In their Forum and Assembly election material, for example, the PUP stressed the increasing distance between its perspectives and those of the representatives of traditional Unionism. This manifested in identifiable electoral support particularly in urban areas, such as the Shankill and the inner East Belfast.

Around which issues was the PUP able to mobilise? Certainly in part, the PUP sought to introduce notions of wider socio-economic conditions directly onto the Unionist agenda. The PUP, for example, continues to describe itself as a pre-Blairite

Labour in its economic motivation. They have also claimed that Unionist politicians had consistently 'failed to consult and therefore misrepresented the views of the Unionist people especially in working class areas' (Progressive Unionist Party, 1996a: 2). The most recent period has seen the PUP mobilise support around a distinct notion of Unionism, reflecting an overt concern for Protestant working class issues.

In another important message, however, while the PUP has restated its commitment to Northern Ireland's constitutional position, it has also defended the rights of others to seek democratic constitutional change (Progressive Unionist Party, 1996b: 1). This marks an important transition within this sections of Unionism. They continue to promote the sharing of responsibility between Unionists and Nationalists, with a legislative role for Nationalism in the Northern Irish Assembly, and the development of a new Constitution and a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. In broader terms they continue to promote ideas of commonality, equality, and plurality (Ervine, 1998, 1999; Progressive Unionist Party, 1996a: 1; 1996c: 1; 1996c: 2).

The other main political organisation located directly in the Protestant working class is the UDP, the origins of which can be found in the development of a political movement from within the Ulster Defence Association (cf. McAuley, 1991a, 1991b, 1994a, 1995a, 1996b). The UDP has not yet developed a fully coherent political programme. One consistent discourse that has emerged, however, has been its strong criticism of the Unionist leadership and its failure to properly represent working class loyalism. In this context the UDP have declared one of its major aims as giving a voice to those who had been without proper representation since the troubles begun (McMichael, 1998; Ulster Democratic Party, 1996a: 1; 1996b: 1). Further, the UDP, has directly condemned the 'phoney politics' played by out-dated Unionist politicians (*Irish Times,* 24 March, 1997).

Both the PUP and the UDP have, in slightly different ways, harnessed this concern. The willingness of sections of the Protestant working class to organise, and to speak for itself in any effective manner, is something that has previously been largely absent. Further, the UDP and PUP have directly challenged the DUP, the grouping that has claimed the lead role within working class loyalist politics for well over two decades.

Adapting the Unionist frame

These processes of Unionist realignment have not been confined to the working class. Another important aspect of Unionism is the increasingly articulate voice, largely located in the Unionist middle classes that have sought to adapt traditional Unionism and represent it in the contemporary period.

One manifestation of this, has been the increasing political prominence of the United Kingdom Unionist Party. The UKUP regard the contemporary political settlement as the realisation of a strategy devised to weaken the Union and implemented by the British and Irish governments, with the full support of the United States administration and the Social Democratic and Labour Party. Much of the opposition mobilised by the UKUP rests on the belief that Unionism still represents a rational political choice within Ireland, because of the economic and social benefits the link with Britain brings.

To complete its brand of Unionism the UKUP project sectarianism as part of an backward looking ideology. In its place they endorse an image of the Union based upon values of pluralism, multi-culturalism and equal citizenship. This exposes another strand of UKUP politics through its criticisms of the traditional Unionist leadership (*Belfast Newsletter,* 7 March, 1995). Bob McCartney, the UKUP leader, for example, has recognised that from the formation of the state Unionism to further its political ends, relied on constructing a discourse of paranoia about the security of Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom. This was particularly seen in times of crisis. One result of this contrived constitutional anxiety, was the development of sectarian loyalism. At times this perspective has led the UKUP to directly criticise its supposed Unionist allies, especially the DUP. Hence the following from Bob McCartney, who claimed that, the fundamentalist views of Ian Paisley, and:

> the sectarian ethos which he has imprinted on his party, provide a major obstacle to the emergence of any radical and pluralist pro-Union philosophy which might … preserve the Union and offer a basis for reconciliation to which everyone could subscribe (*Belfast Telegraph,* 28 September, 1994).

Part of the UKUP project remains therefore, to reinterpret Unionism, to move it away from its sectarian past, towards a

more moderate, modernised form. To ensure this, much of the output from the UKUP, can best be explained by its drive towards political integrationism with the rest of the United Kingdom. This reading overlaps with the attempts of other Unionists to frame contemporary social and political relations. In particular, there are similarities to the position promoted by several leading Unionist intellectuals and academics (cf. Aughey, 1994, 1995, 1997; Aughey *et al*, 1995; English and Walker, 1996; Foster, 1995; Nesbitt, 1995; Porter, 1996; Roche, 1994; Roche and Birnie, 1995, 1996). These views have been further supported by a series of pamphlets and papers written by the Cardogan Group (1992, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1998), Queen's University Ulster Unionist Association (1988, 1989) and the Ulster Young Unionist Council (1995a, 1995b; Holmes, 1996), and through the journal, *Unionist Review*.

As a counterpoise to what they see as the success of the republican movement in controlling the dynamic to the peace process, many of the above Unionists, argue that it is still the Union that fundamentally expresses the most desirable political, social and cultural realities of the Irish situation (cf. Aughey, 1995; Foster *et al*, 1995). This position is given further credence by Aughey (1997) who has pointed to what he sees as the very core of contemporary Unionism. Firstly, that UK membership confers an unequivocal British political status, and secondly, that there is no natural political unity in Ireland. Unionism is a clear reflection of profound religious, cultural, political and economic differences on the Island. These views dovetail firmly with that part of the UKUP ideology that seeks to distance itself from sectarianism. However, because of the ways in which they define the problem, both groups offer extremely limited political options. The key dynamic of this modernising Unionism seeks to present in prudent terms, the benefits of the Union to all of the people of Northern Ireland. Porter (1996: 127) summarises the main tenets of this as follows, it:

> offers a 'rational' political position unhampered by sectarianism and uncluttered by esoteric interpretations of history and religion. Instead of exclusiveness and special covenants, it recommends inclusiveness and plain contractual arrangements.

Much of the support for this brand of Unionism comes from that strata of the Northern Irish middle classes that have benefited

most since the early 1970s. Coulter (1994; 1997: 133–39) rightly characterises the increasing prominence the UKUP as a result of political movement within the Unionist professional classes, largely dismayed at the form of contemporary Unionism. The resulting rational choice and modernisation perspectives outlined above however, marks only part of the UKUP's construction of politics.

Re-elaborating the Unionist frame

The UKUP also construct a far more fundamentalist framing of contemporary events. They still see the ultimate objective of the peace process as the separation of Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom. What is more, the British government has become a facilitator for a settlement based on Irish unity following a conditional surrender from the IRA (McCartney n.d.[a]: 8; *Belfast Telegraph*, 19 June, 1995). Their key goal has been to keep the republican movement engaged in negotiating a political resolution to the conflict between Sinn Féin/IRA and the British state. The settlement is thus dependant upon creating a united Ireland in all but name. Eventually a full unitary state will exist through the ever increasing harmonisation of economic, social, educational and cultural functions across the Island.

Hence, the UKUP have also interpreted recent events within a frame that bounds and explains that Northern Ireland's interests as having become subordinate to the interests of protecting of the economy of the British mainland from further attack (McCartney, n.d.[b]: 4). Further, for supporters of the UK Unionists, the contemporary political settlement has merely served to raise the political expectations of Irish Nationalists and republicans to unrealistic levels. As a consequence, Unionist resentment has been dramatically increased, and there has been a growing awareness by Unionists that:

> their culture, their education, their tradition, the future values of their children, and the symbols of their British identity are being systematically eroded to meet the requirements of violent republicanism' (*The Irish Times*, 8 December, 1997).

This part of the UKUP's explanation overlaps directly with the

broader DUP frame. Mirroring the UKUP claims the DUP have also argued that the whole peace process is designed to negotiate away the very future of Ulster (Democratic Unionist Party, 1996a, 1). For this reason, in the 1997 UK General Election, the DUP argued that it was engaged in the 'most important election since the setting up of the Ulster state' (*New Protestant Telegraph,* March, 1997: 1). Central to this framing is the belief that voting for the DUP is an expression of support for a Unionism that 'has no truck with Sinn Féin/IRA. It is a vote to keep Ulster firmly within the Union with proper democratic structures and no interference from Dublin' (*New Protestant Telegraph*, 1997: 1). Further, in their manifesto for the Assembly the DUP claimed:

> Dublin interference in Ulster's affairs is planned to increase and intensify. We will not collude with others to set up the embryo of a United Ireland. Northern Ireland's future is safe in our hands (Democratic Unionist Party, *1998 Assembly Manifesto*: 2).

Underpinning much of the above, is the openly articulated belief that the constitutional link with Britain is, at best, being weakened, at worst, actively eroded by the contemporary negotiated settlement. This framing was reinforced by the position taken by both the DUP and UKUP in campaigning for a 'No' vote in the 'Good Friday Agreement'[2] referendum. As the leadership of the UKUP argued, far from bringing peace, the Agreement would only encourage terrorists who would return to a military campaign should the political process fail to deliver what the terrorists dictated (Belfast Telegraph 2 May, 1998). Again these views found full support from Ian Paisley, who argued that a 'No vote' in the referendum was:

> the only positive way you and I can declare our faith in truth, real justice and meaningful and lasting peace while at the same time saving the Union. A yes vote is a vindication of terrorism, not a reprimand of terrorism (*Belfast Telegraph*, 2 May, 1998).

This discourse has the power to mobilise Unionist opposition across most factions of the Unionist bloc. A major concern for both DUP and UKUP has been to expose what they see as the hidden agenda of the peace process and the deliberate plans to degrade Unionist culture and to force Northern Ireland out of

the Union (cf. DUP *Press Release,* 27 October, 1997; *The Orange Standard,* December, 1997; February, 1998). From within this section of Unionism there is constant reference to Unionists being pushed down a road they do not wish to tread. Gregory Campbell of the DUP expressed this clearly in the following passage:

> …I look upon the problems in the peace process as very much indicative of not only the Republican attitude but also the Nationalist attitude. It's almost as if within the Nationalist/Republican community that there is a view of events moving along in a particular direction; they look upon Unionists as petulant children who will eventually come to an understanding that we, the enlightened Nationalists, have had for years. I find that offensive. But that is the perspective that's growing, not diminishing, in the Unionist community… There is no understanding that Unionists, particularly the brand of Unionist that I represent, cannot and will not reconcile themselves to sitting across the table from somebody with a mask on and an M60. They won't now, and they won't in the future. And yet there's this insidious insistence which says that eventually Unionists will come to their senses, this patronizing belief that Unionists will eventually be reconciled to their fate (Campbell, 1996: 29).

This excerpt is worth considering at some length. Such views continue to find support across Unionism, particularly from those who believe that the British government is intent on withdrawal and has allowed a foreign administration to take a central role in the political development of a region of the UK. This represents a key discourse around which contemporary Unionist hegemony is constructing.

The distinct symmetry between the ideological framing and the political positioning of the DUP and UKUP (and perhaps beyond), is of no little consequence for the future political direction of Unionism. The success of these parties in forging a common position that can mobilise across very different social strata provides a key point of reference around which Unionists can rally. For supporters of both the UKUP and the DUP, the future of the Union has been compromised, perhaps catastrophically, by the search for political accommodation in Northern Ireland. For them, at the core of the New Labour project, is a plan to sacrifice Ulster's constitutional position on

the altar of political expediency (*Irish News*, 26 January, 1998; *Belfast Telegraph*, 30 November, 1988).

The reidentification of the enemies of Ulster, and an ever expanding definition of those encompassed by the term has again come to the fore. Thus, the UKUP and the DUP, have branded all those Unionists who have entered into debate with political opponents as 'traitors' (cf. *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 October, 1994; *Belfast Telegraph,* 18 October, 1994). Ian Paisley, re-emphasised this at the 1998 DUP Conference when he claimed that the Unionist people were currently divided because of 'false leadership' (*Irish News*, 30 November, 1998). For the DUP, any form of negotiation, whether with republicans, or the British or Irish Governments, continues to represent 'high treason against the constitution of (the) United Kingdom' (*Irish News*, 26 January, 1998).

This frames a specific reading of events, within which the search for a political settlement is seen as synonymous with a constitutional crisis. In so doing, the DUP frame not only a specific interpretation of history, but also a discourse that links the past directly with the present, whereby Unionism needs eternal vigilance against its foes. This is a seductive perspective for Unionists. Jarman highlights the importance of this, particularly in the context of contemporary Orange Order parades, when he argues that for Unionists this sense of tradition:

> implies a sense of permanence, an unchanging deep rooted custom, a continuity between what is done today and what was done by their forefathers. …Contemporary parading practices have been shaped by the broader political world, and have been an important element in creating that world. …They pass the memory of difference through the generations (Jarman, 1997: 252–3).

With their election to the Northern Ireland Assembly the DUP made clear their continued opposition to any notion of an agreed political settlement. Peter Robinson, of the DUP, has claimed that the party should now seek to 'transform a Unionist rejection (of the peace process) into a Unionist assembly rejection' (*The Irish News*, 30 November, 1998). This echoes much of the DUP refrain of the past 25 years, that it is only it that can be entrusted not to sell out the Unionist 'birthright', and to defend Ulster.(*The Irish Times*, 1 December, 1997).

Mobilising contemporary Unionism

All of this indicates that the future direction of Unionism and loyalism will in large part at least, be determined by the outcome of the struggle between those that mobilise around a construct of the peace process as some basis for 'settlement' and those that see it as a form of 'sell-out'. Importantly, sections of Unionism currently frame an understanding formulated around the belief that it stands alone, abandoned even by the British government. It is this reinterpretation, of the old Unionist theme of perfidy, which has allowed the leadership of the DUP and the UKUP to mobilise against the 'Good Friday Agreement', and the Northern Ireland Assembly.[3] In this sense, the DUP and UKUP are offering a clear political choice, and a position around which traditional Unionism can further organise.

The DUP has always claimed that its politics best express the concerns of working class loyalism. Support from that section of Northern Irish society for the DUP has, however, become restricted, as pivotal groups have responded positively to some of the alternative readings being presented to them. This can be recognised in the analyses coming from within new loyalism. The recent shaping of PUP and UDP politics, and the candid rebuttal of them, especially from the DUP, has come to the forefront in the redefinition and of Unionism. One result has been an increased articulation of the contrary visions of Unionism (cf. Bew, Patterson and Teague, 1997; Cochrane, 1997; Coulter, 1994, 1997; McAuley, 1994, 1995b, 1996a, 1996b, 1997a, 1997b; Ruane and Todd, 1996; Shirlow and McGovern, 1997: 1-15; Todd, 1987, 1994). As a consequence, there have been a series of challenges to the hegemonic position of the DUP within working class loyalism.

The intersection of ideologies and social constructions in shaping ideas remains extremely complex (cf. Burr, 1995; Hall, 1990, 1996a, 1996b; Michael, 1996; Preston, 1997). In the context of Unionist social and political identity, a central task for both the UKUP and the DUP have been to reaffirm their parameters of legitimate power and identity. This often means confining Unionist political debate to self-perpetuating and self-enforcing discourses. One of the outcomes identified here has been the synthesises between the DUP and the UKUP. Whether this is a short term tactical cohesion, or it will solidify into something more permanent around which tradition Unionism

can reconstruct remains crucial. Can their analysis succeed in attracting other strands of Unionism to their frame, to a position whereby it will become assertive and Unionist hegemony will reconstruct around it?

The DUP and UKUP have essentially formulated their response to the peace process in terms of it being a coherent attack on Unionist values and culture. There are examples of such ideas coming to the fore even from those Unionists largely supportive of the peace process. During the late summer of 1998 for example, Billy Hutchinson of the PUP, claimed that loyalists were losing faith in the peace process because of the perception that it was biased towards the republican movement. Further, he suggested that many within the Unionist community believed that 'republicans are getting everything and Unionists are getting nothing' (*The Irish Times*, 11 August, 1998).

Another key aspect of DUP and UKUP discourse is the negative symbolism they evoke and through it the continuing identification of Ulster's enemies as threatening the very existence of the state. Take this view from the *Orange Standard*, (the official newspaper of the Orange Order), which claimed:

> Ulster is in extreme peril with its existence under greater threat than at any time since the Home Rule crisis of 1912-14. Enemies within and without threaten Unionism. The Republic of Ireland already has a greater say than ever before in the affairs of Northern Ireland, and if the Belfast Agreement is implemented in full that influence will increase (*Orange Standard*, September, 1998: 1).

The combination of these ideas has proved to be another focus for mobilisation, giving further credibility to the DUP's claim that it is it is only the DUP that recognise the true purpose of the peace process and are best able to organise to defend the anti-settlement Unionist population. As Peter Robinson, writing after the Assembly elections, expressed it, for decades no political progress could be made because a nationalist minority opposed any 'democratic solution'. Now, does 'the government believe that it can build a stable political future without the support of the Unionist community ?' (1998: 1).

As this paper has demonstrated, however, there are counter frames within contemporary Unionism. Those most directly promoting some form of political accommodation with Irish

Nationalism, have emerged from within the Protestant working class and sections of loyalist paramilitarism. The beliefs of such groupings draw directly on the structures of Protestant working class communities. For many loyalists their recent experiences need to be understood in the context of the removal of real political power, the break-up of political and ideological certainties, and rapidly declining economic circumstances (cf. Duffy and Evans, 1997; Gillespie, Lovett and Garner, 1992; Munck and Hamilton, 1998; McGovern and Shirlow, 1997, McNamee and Lovett, 1989; O'Hearn, 1998; Rowthorn and Wayne, 1988).

Hence, sections of 'new loyalism' have sought to reframe working class loyalism to include some recognition of its changed economic, political and social circumstances. These factors have, and will, serve to expose further incongruities in relationships between the Protestant working class and the traditional Unionist political leadership. It is the PUP that has been best able to mobilise support around this sense of changing social conditions and the internal questioning of Unionism. Certainly several leading members of the PUP have been candid in their assessment of the failures of the traditional Unionist state. Take for example, this recent statement from David Ervine:

> We live in a society which is made up of paramilitary groups; drug gangs; house-breaking gangs; "Christians" who hate; politicians who won't politic; punishment beatings; horrendous domestic violence; a pathetic delivery of education to the working class; large numbers of unwanted pregnancies; a demoralised health service; a polluted environment; gross personal debt; continued growth of a benefit mentality; a fragile economy; unacceptable levels of unemployment; and many, many other difficulties (*Belfast Telegraph*, 15 March, 1999).

Some Conclusions

So has new loyalism permanently altered the face of Unionism? It would be foolish to council anything but caution in assessing the possibility of any progressive turn within Unionism. Further, in any appraisal it is important to be aware of what O'Dowd (1998: 137) identifies as the dependency of supposedly liberal or 'non-sectarian' Unionists to rely on the sectarian

mobilisation of others. Nonetheless, the period of the peace process has exposed different, sometimes conflicting, sometimes overlapping, forces, within Unionism. Part of the response, has involved an attempt to reshape and reframe Unionist group identities.

There is evidence that new loyalism has succeeded, in part at least, in reconstructing its past and in developing a secular working class articulation of Unionism, that actively promotes social equality and dialogue. Mobilisation around such a frame contests the dominant frame within Unionism and makes it more difficult for Unionist hegemony to formulate around its traditional form.

The recent political organisation, and comparative electoral success, of the loyalist paramilitaries, marks a break in the political dynamic of Unionism. It represents the manifestation of a distinctive ideological position, offering a different interpretation and understanding of the political memories of Unionism. This involves framing contemporary events within an explanation that emphasises a distinct notion of community, the social origins of the conflict, and the explicit experiences of Protestant working class communities, which are not necessarily exclusive of its Catholic counterpart. Importantly, they have sought to explain from within, the changing political circumstances and the relative social and economic decline of the Protestant working class. This has included some articulation of the relationship with, and sometimes opposition to, other class fractions within Unionism.

While the explanations of the UDP and especially the PUP compete directly with the dominant discourses and frames within Unionism, it is equally important to recognise that there remains a strong counter construction to their analysis around a re-elaboration of Unionism's traditional frame that still finds unanimity with many. This interpretation, and the resultant political mobilisation, with the DUP on the prow, still organises a substantial section of Unionism that genuinely fears the outcome of the settlement. Such positions are framed by, and Unionist hegemony constructed around, a particular set of beliefs that emphasise continuance, and draw on that particular sense of the past outlined above.

If new loyalism continues to develop along its stated path it may yet form the basis for a political solution and herald a new direction from Unionism. However, while the ideologies of new

loyalism may have modified and extended the themes of Unionism it seems unlikely that they can bring about a break from them. In the meantime, Unionism seems destined to continue along its traditional route.

Notes

1. The original version of this paper was presented at a workshop organised by *Capital & Class*, held at the Department of Geosciences, Queen's University Belfast on 26th September 1998. I am grateful to all those who made comments and gave feedback, both formal and informal, both during the event and much later into the night.
2. In the early hours of Saturday 11 April 1998, after long last minute negotiations, the British and Irish governments joined with the Northern Ireland political parties to agree a deal concerning the future governance of Northern Ireland. It largely became known as the 'Good Friday Agreement' or the 'Belfast Agreement' (*Irish Times*, 11 April 1998).
3. The party support in the new Northern Ireland Assembly is as follows: UUP (Pro-agreement unionist) 28; SDLP (Pro-agreement nationalist) 24; DUP (Anti-agreement unionist) 20; Sinn Féin (Pro agreement nationalist) 18; Alliance (Pro-agreement) 6; UKUP (Anti-agreement unionist); Independents (Anti-agreement unionist) 3; PUP (Pro-agreement unionist) 2; Women's Coalition (Pro-agreement) 2.

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