



***Mid-South Armagh Loyal Orders Focus
Group***

26th April 2006

***'A Summary of Findings &
Recommendations'***

The Community Conventions

In March 2003, an ad-hoc group of politicians and community leaders, known as 'The Think Tank' met informally to discuss the state and future of local Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities (PUL). The reason we use this term is because the use of any one of these labels over simplifies the issue of interpreting the complexity of political and cultural identity in Northern Ireland and particularly in Protestant communities.

After a few months of discussion it was agreed it was imperative that a programme to 'Transform Loyalist Communities' should be developed. The analysis was based on the belief that whilst many issues of deprivation are common to disadvantaged communities across Northern Ireland, there were issues, experiences and dynamics that are particular and distinct to PUL communities. These issues express themselves, for example, around levels of educational underachievement, population decline / imbalance, paramilitarism, physical degeneration, alienation and stigmatisation governed by a sense of loss. The Think Tank believed mainstream Government programmes were failing to effectively address these problems and if transformation was to be achieved it would require a particular focus and special programmes.

The Convention Model

A number of the Think Tank members had been involved with the first Shankill Convention, a community based response to the devastating paramilitary feud. The Greater Shankill Community Convention, held in May/June 2002, was organised around a two-day exhibition emphasising community achievements, involving over eighty local interests, followed by two days of discussions around key local issues facing the community. The agenda was set by the community itself which reflected local ownership of the Convention.

The Shankill Convention succeeded in establishing a new sense of community confidence, a unity of purpose and a resolve to work together. It became a mechanism which the community could use to come together to address strategic issues such as, housing, unemployment and education.

The Work Begins

The Think Tank believed the process of transformation could be enhanced, in the first instance, by using the Convention model in other PUL communities and they successfully lobbied government for funding to run four pilot conventions across Northern Ireland, the first of which was a successful follow-up Convention held on the Shankill in September 2004. Also that month, the Community Conventions was formally established with a board representative of the different interests of the PUL community. A staff team and base was established in January 2005.

The Aims of a Convention?

The aim of the Convention is:

- To encourage and reinforce individual and community confidence
- To improve relationships within disadvantaged Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities and with government
- To develop a positive vision for disadvantaged Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities
- To identify areas for action e.g. capacity building
- To lobby for policy change

The process of developing a community convention is underpinned by the values of inclusiveness and transparency.

Mid and South Armagh

The representatives of Protestant Unionist Loyalist Networking, (P/U/L Networking), keen to follow up on the work of previous focus groups, believed a Community Convention was a way forward for P/U/L communities in mid-south Armagh. A Community Convention would enable all sections of the P/U/L community in the area to come together, to identify their needs and to ascertain what they need to do together and on what issues they need to challenge Government and public sector bodies.

P/U/L Networking have agreed to act as a co-ordinating body for the Mid-South Armagh Convention with the support of the Community Conventions staff team. However, the P/U/L Networking and Community Conventions want to include more local people in the preparations until a fully representative Local Area Committee can be established to oversee the Convention and the implementation of its recommendations.

In the interim and as a result of a series of meetings with P/U/L Networking and Community Conventions it was also recommended that a number of focus groups be conducted in order to get as many local people as possible involved in the planning and preparations not only of the focus groups but the Convention itself in order to ensure everyone's voice is heard.

It is with the latter in mind and following meetings between P/U/L Networking and Community Conventions that it was agreed five focus groups should be organised as soon as possible, these focus groups are to be developed around:

- Youth
- Women
- Churches
- Bands
- Loyal Orders

Loyal Orders Focus Group

In accordance with the Community Conventions model for a convention based approach to assess the needs existing in Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist communities throughout Northern Ireland a workshop was organised on the Loyal Orders for 26th April 2006 in the Old Courthouse, Markethill. Understanding that the process of developing a Community Convention is underpinned by the values of inclusiveness and transparency, invitations were sent to various representatives of Loyal Orders throughout the Mid and South Armagh area.

The focus group was co-ordinated by the Community Conventions and facilitated by Martin Snodden. It ran from 7.30 pm until 10 pm and had no particular prescribed format, in order to ensure it was as informal as possible to allow for open and honest dialogue to ensue.

Armagh and the Loyal Orders, have gone hand in hand from the days immediately after the Battle of the Diamond in 1795. Dan Winters cottage has historically been named as the founding place of the Orange Institute and still stands as a monument to Orangeism. It is not therefore surprising that the Community Conventions and PUL Networking wished to explore of the experiences of the Loyal Orders within Mid and South Armagh.

Invitations were delivered to many within the Loyal Orders, those that arrived suggested that the absence of more participants reflected the growing belief that 'war weariness' and past 'disappointments' influence members choice. However, those that did attend brought with them a wide spectrum of opinion and energy for change that will transform local people's experiences of the Loyal Orders.

Beginning the evening's dialogue the assembled group were asked:

1. What brought you here tonight?
2. Why did you become a Member of a Loyal Order?
3. What difference did it make to you, your family and/or your community in becoming a Member of a Loyal Order?
4. What difficulties do the Loyal Orders face?
5. Where would you like the Loyal Orders to be in 10 years time?

It was obvious that those in attendance were passionate about their beliefs and values associated with membership of the Loyal Orders. They responded with honest comment and contemplation on present day circumstances resulting from many years of verbal attack on top of terrorist actions and threat.

With reference to the question 'Why did you become a Member of a Loyal Order?' the group responded with thoughts that the Orders channelled their beliefs in a different, more positive and peaceful direction. Many thought that membership of a Loyal Order actually saved lives (mainly Catholic, Nationalist, Republican) because of the impact the values and beliefs had on them.

It was further suggested by the participants that it would have been more dangerous **not** to have had the Loyal Orders. Those present felt there was no doubt that the Loyal Orders 'held things together,' and that it cooled heads and 'kept a lid on things.' In short, participants believed that the Loyal Orders acted as a stabilising force or organisation that helped to reduce chaos and mayhem by channelling energies that could have easily have been diverted into more violent and destructive activities.

Some also cited the reason they became a member of the Loyal Orders was because of family upbringing which meant that it was a natural progress into it, while others said it was because you felt part of something and part of a

community. In the Armagh area the Loyal Orders is increasingly being seen by some younger members as a community organisation, even though some would argue that it has always been one. Indeed, some participants went as far as saying that the Loyal Orders may even have been one of the first ever community organisations in the UK when they met in Dan Winters cottage and that the community led and driven ethos of the Loyal Orders, particularly in the 1960's/1970's, needed to be recreated.

Other reasons given for being a member of a Loyal Order included the desire to learn more about Protestant culture, history and identity and to be a part of the politics of the country but within a different context and setting to the competitive party politics that exists in Northern Ireland. It was also mentioned that some joined the Loyal Orders to gain respectability within their community- reflecting the respectful place of the Orange Institutions within the Protestant community.

When asked what threats exist for the Loyal Orders, some participants suggested that declining numbers and dormant members were two very real threats. Others thought that while the Loyal Orders are multigenerational, there is a higher concentration of older people than young and suggested that fresh faces needed to be enticed into joining the movement, to ensure that it does not become a 'dying' force.

A variety of other 'threats' were identified, including the difference in membership levels in urban and rural areas. Participants stressed that Loyal Orders in urban areas have seen a decrease in membership, while rural areas have seen a slow increase in membership. However, it was noted that part of the reason for this 'movement' in numbers is because of societal and demographic changes.

Allied to this issue of membership was the fact that irrespective of where you're Lodge is, one of the major difficulties 'active' Loyal Order members face is with

members who pay their dues, but no longer attend meetings and the question of how they can be re-engaged.

Many of the participants noted that this lack of engagement was due to an increase in apathy within the Loyal Orders, coupled with the attitude 'what difference will it make if I join a Loyal Order?' However, they recognised that this apathy was not unique to the movement, it is 'rife' throughout the Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist community in general, as they feel that their expectations have been raised many times, (Anglo-Irish Agreement Rally for example) but it 'didn't do any good' again exacerbating feelings of apathy in terms of peaceful protest and further emphasising the perception that the PUL community is tired ('war weariness'), traumatised and overburdened.

In trying to ascertain why there has been a slower uptake in membership within Loyal Orders when compared to bands, in particular 'Blood and Thunder' bands which are rapidly growing in numbers, especially among young people, a variety of explanations were offered. Participants felt that young people seem to identify more with the bands, band culture and identity than they do with the Loyal Orders. Young people want to march with their band, but not with a Loyal Order. Participants felt that part of the reason for this was because the Loyal Orders are not only a religious based movement, but very much rules and regulations led which can 'put many people off.' In contrast, the bands would not be viewed, especially by young people, to be as stringent in terms of religion and rules and regulations when compared to the Loyal Orders which therefore makes band membership more enticing.

The religious ethos of the organisation was subject to much discussion among the participants who stressed that a number of churches in Mid and South Armagh only remain open because of the Loyal Orders. They also felt that within rural areas, the religious elements and ethos of the Loyal Orders was of more importance than in urban areas. Participants agreed that if the religious element

was relaxed, there would be a dramatic increase in numbers in the Loyal Orders in both urban and rural areas, however it was emphasised that it is a Christian organisation so why should it abandon its Christian ethos?

In terms of society and in particular, societal changes participants stressed that the Loyal Orders are no longer middle class led- the 'footmen' stepped up and 'took over the reins' when the middle class began to retreat from the Orders. The participants highlighted that not as many businessmen are members of the Loyal Orders today as there was in the past. This is because for some, there was no 'profit' in continuing to be a member of a Loyal Order. In contrast, the point was also raised that many 'principled' businessmen who remained in a Loyal Order lost their business *because* they were members of a Loyal Order.

When the participants focused their thoughts on the question 'What made you come here tonight in comparison to those members who pay their dues but don't attend meetings?' the following was recorded.

Individuals wanted to broaden their horizons, and to share and exchange information and experiences. Those present also realised what can be achieved when you put the effort in. Most were looking to the future and wanted a vision not only for PUL communities across Northern Ireland, but a vision for the Loyal Orders, one in which the Loyal Orders are a strong, positive and peaceful source for good.

When the question was posed 'What do you see in terms of the future that others don't?' the responses included: 'I can see what a difference being a member of a Loyal Order has made for me and I want the same for my children.' 'I want to influence others, develop relationships and build the membership.' 'I want the Loyal Orders to become a community resource by providing a hall where people feel free to come and meet others and socialise for example.' The group also wanted sustainability. Thoughts about this included a move away from grant

dependency, even though it was recognised that very little had been accessed in terms of grants by the Loyal Orders.

When quizzed about 'Where would you like the Loyal Orders to be in 10 years time?' the group responded with the following:

- more young people in its membership but not at the expense of its older members;
- that the community spirit of the 1960's and 1970's would be recreated;
- that it runs activities for the community such as table quizzes and football matches etc;
- that cooperation, not competition, would exist in Unionist circles;
- that it would have become a movement that continually looks at itself and changes to ensure it is meeting the needs of its members; and
- that it would have become a motivated movement.

The final point prompted the question 'How do you create this motivation?- What motivates you?' The participants responded again offering their thoughts that Loyal Order members needed to see the Orange Halls in use every night and realise that Orange Halls are a community resource and can be the life blood of the community. Participants emphasised that in order to meet the needs of the community Orange Halls needed to be modernised and upgraded and much funding would be required to achieve this. Participants also wanted activities to be run in Orange Halls all year round, particularly during the summer months when there are less activities organised, especially for young people. Finally, participants wanted an increase in the socialising aspect of the movement and for this to be built upon, to make people feel that they really 'belong' to and are 'part of' something worthwhile. When pushed on what motivated their brother Lodge members, those in attendance identified that networking and the 'personal touch' when organising things made a difference to levels of participation.

This dialogue led into the realms of public relations, publicity, and communication. The participants thought that the Loyal Orders needed to let people know the good work that is taking place and to tell people about the positives, 'don't let the media tell one side of the story.' Public relations, publicity, and communication were highlighted as a must for the Loyal Orders if they are to reinforce a positive message to the general public and government on a local, national and international level and survive the negative propaganda that exists today. Consequently, participants stressed the need for training on how to deal with the media, advice and guidance on how to positively sell themselves and use their friends and allies to their advantage.

This direction naturally brought us back to the difficulties associated with marching and consequently the need to 'know your rights' when it comes to the law. Thoughts then turned to the PSNI.

Participants felt they needed to change Police Officer's attitudes towards parades in general, but in particular, in relation to the Loyal Orders and marching bands movement. Participants felt that the PSNI are too 'heavy handed' when policing parades and that much work needs to be done with the PSNI to raise awareness and understanding of parades, bands and the Protestant culture and identity in general.

Other thoughts included the desire to actively work with the Government - in particular to influence them and to be consulted with on issues pertaining to the interests of the Loyal Orders movement. One of the major issues that participants wished to engage with Government on was their perceived policy of rewarding 'bad behaviour,' as witnessed at times of street disturbances.

Other issues touched on towards the end of the scheduled time included the following:

- Renewing Communities - participants felt that this was a document which allowed Government to legitimately give money to PUL communities in Belfast and in particular North and West Belfast. Many of the participants stated 'If it hadn't been for the Whiterock- would Belfast have got the money?'
- Orange ethos - it is steeped in religion and law and order yet it often has a difficulty with the state and law and order, why?
- DUP seem to be taking steps towards changing - when will the Loyal Orders?
- Need to ensure that our leaders are portraying the right image of the movement.
- Need to move past the 'individual versus group' mentality.
- Need more engagement with the Parades Commission - many wished there had been more active engagement with the Parades Commission from an early point.
- Need to remove the fragmentation and jealousy that exists in the P/U/L community as this is hampering development.
- Need to improve our networking and communication - there is an absence of sharing of information- for example we need to tell people about the focus group tonight as we cannot wait for people to come to us.

- We need to take pride in saying we are Protestant.
- We need to maximise the tourist and economic potential of the Loyal Orders and use this as an influencer with Government and Statutory Agencies.

Conclusion

It has to be acknowledged that those in attendance provided a passionate insight into the views within the Loyal Orders at this time of uncertainty. I would like to further acknowledge the commitment and sensitivities demonstrated during this evening workshop, those present were true to their beliefs and their values. There should be no doubt that the views expressed by those present are indeed representative of the views from within the Loyal Orders.

Loyal Orders Focus Group
Community Convention Workshop

25th April 2006

Venue: Markethill
Time: 7:30 – 9:30 pm
Present: 5 Loyal Order representatives

Kenny Moffat
Ivan Warnock
Mervyn Dougan
Quincey Dougan
Johnston Henry

Facilitated by: Martin Snoddon

In attendance: Dawn Shackels

Opening Questions

- What brought you here tonight?
- Why did you become a Member of a Loyal Order?
- What difference did it make to you, your family and/or your community in becoming a Member of a Loyal Order?
- What difficulties do the Loyal Orders face?
- Where would you like the Loyal Orders to be in 5 years time?

Why did you become a Member of a Loyal Order?

- It channelled my beliefs in a different, more positive and peaceful direction. Many felt that being a member of a Loyal Order actually saved lives (mainly of C/N/R) because of the impact it had on Members- 'it would have been more dangerous not to have had the Loyal Orders'
- Order appeared to 'hold things together' it- 'cooled heads and 'kept a lid on things' it was a 'stabilising organisation' and helped to reduce 'chaos and mayhem'
- It channelled my energy
- To learn more about my own culture, history and identity
- To look at and be part of the politics of the country, but within a different context and setting
- Respectability
- Family upbringing meant it was natural to progress into a Loyal Order

- It is a community organisation, in fact it was probably the 1st ever community organisation in the UK

Threats to Loyal Orders

Declining Numbers and Dormant Members

- While the Loyal Orders are multigenerational, there is a higher concentration of older people and young, fresh faces need to be enticed into joining the movement, to ensure that it does not become a 'dying' force.
- Loyal Orders in urban areas have seen a decrease in membership, part of this is due to societal and demographic changes.
- There are many members who pay their dues but no longer attend meetings- how can these members be re-engaged?

Apathy

- However it was recognized that the PUL community in general suffers from much apathy- added to this is the attitude of 'what difference will it make if I join a Loyal Order?'
- PUL community is tired (war weariness) and overburdened which has a 'knock-on' effect on the Loyal Orders in terms of membership
- Expectations have been raised many times, (Anglo-Irish Agreement Rally for example) but it 'didn't do any good' which exacerbates feelings of apathy.

Bands/Band Culture

- 'Blood and Thunder bands' are growing in numbers especially among young people, but the same cannot be said for the Loyal Orders. Young people seem to identify more with the bands, band culture and identity than they do with the Loyal Orders. Young people want to march with their band, but not with a Loyal Order.

Rules, Regulations & Religion

- The Loyal Orders are not only a religious based movement, but very much rules and regulations led which can 'put many people off.' In contrast, the bands would not be as stringent in terms of religion and rules and regulations as the Loyal Orders.
- In terms of religion, a number of points were raised:
 1. For a number of churches in Mid and South Armagh it is the members of the Loyal Orders that keep them open because of their religious ethos

2. If the rule in terms of religion was relaxed, there would be a dramatic increase in numbers in the Loyal Orders; however it is a Christian organisation so why should it abandon its Christian ethos?
3. Religion and the religious elements of Loyal Orders is of more importance in rural areas as opposed to urban

Attitudes

- Loyal Orders can be seen as belligerent

Societal Changes

- Loyal Orders are no longer middle class led- the 'footmen' stepped up and took over the reins when the middle class began to retreat from the Orders
- Not as many businessmen are members of the Loyal Orders as there were in the past. This is because for some, there was no 'profit' in being a member of a Loyal Order. However, the point was also raised that many 'principled' businessmen who remained in a Loyal Order lost their business in the main because they were members of a Loyal Order.
- In the late 60's/early 70's the Loyal Orders were very much community led and driven, they were the first real community groups. However, as society developed or 'drifted' there is now a desire within some areas for the movement to go back to its roots to recreate the community feeling of the 60s/70s.

What made you come here tonight in comparison to those members who pay their dues but don't attend meetings?

- To broaden my horizons
- To share and exchange information and experiences
- Realise what can be achieved when you put the effort in
- Am looking to the future and want a vision not only for PUL communities across NI, but a vision for the Loyal Orders, one in which the Loyal Orders are a strong, positive and peaceful source of good

What do you see in terms of the future that others don't?

- 'The Future's Bright, the Future's Orange'
- Can see what a difference being a member of a Loyal Order has made for me and want the same for my children
- To influence others, develop relationships and build membership
- That the Loyal Orders become a community resource by providing a hall where people feel free to come and meet others, socialize etc
- Sustainability- move away from grant dependency, even though very little has been accessed in terms of grants by the Loyal Orders.

Where would you like the Loyal Orders to be in 10 years time?

- With more young people in its membership- but not at the expense of its older members
- That it has recreated the community spirit of the 60s/70s
- It runs activities for the community- table quizzes, football etc
- That there is co-operation not competition
- It becomes a motivated movement
- More cohesive movement that shares information, experiences and resources- Too much fragmentation exists at the moment.
- That it becomes a movement that continually looks to itself and changes to ensure it is meeting the needs of its members.

How do you create this motivation?- What motivates you?

- Local people need to see the Halls in use every night and realize that the Hall is a community resource
- The Halls are modernized and upgraded to meet the needs of community
- Networking-personal touch when organising things
- Activities to be run all year round, but particularly during the summer months when there are less activities organized for young people
- Socialising side of the movement to be built upon- make people feel like they really 'belong' to and are 'part of' something
- Increase the 'pool' of volunteers

PR/Publicity/Communication

- Need to let people know the good work taking place- tell people about the positives, don't let the media tell one side of the story.

Training

- Need training in how to deal with the media- need to continuously reinforce a positive message of the loyal orders to the general public and government on a local, national and international level. Need to be able to positively sell ourselves, use our friends and our allies to put a 'positive spin' on events as and when this approach is needed.
- Need to know our rights when it comes to the law- what we should expect

PSNI

- To try and change for the positive, Police Officer's attitudes towards parades, Loyal Orders and Marching Bands Movement
- To help the PSNI police a parade as its is felt the 'don't know how to'
- To work with the PSNI to raise awareness and understanding of Parades, Loyal Orders and Marching Bands Movement.

Government

- To actively work with the Government, influence them and be consulted with
- Change what is perceived to be Government's policy in terms of rewarding 'bad behaviour'

Other Issues

- Renewing Communities- seen as a document which has legitimized Government giving money to PUL communities in North Belfast. If it hadn't been for the Whiterock- would Belfast have got the money?
- Orange ethos- it is steeped in religion and law and order yet it often has a difficulty with the state and law and order
- DUP seem to be taking steps towards changing- when will the loyal orders? (Could be argued that the meeting on 2nd May 2006 with the SDLP was a step in the right direction)
- Need to ensure that our leaders are portraying the right image of the movement
- Need to move past the 'individual vs group' mentality
- Need more engagement with the Parades Commission- many felt that they wished there had been more active engagement with the Parades Commission from an early point
- Need to remove the fragmentation and jealousy that exists in the PUL community as this is hampering development
- Need to improve our networking and communication- there is an absence of sharing of information- for example we need to tell people about the focus group tonight as we cannot wait for people to come to us
- We need to take pride in the saying we are Protestant
- We need to maximize the tourist and economic potential of the loyal orders and use this as an influencer with Government and Statutory Agencies.