Daily Ireland

end game

HISTORIC IRA STATEMENT

Irish Republican Army

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) as we know it, was borne out of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and the Irish Volunteers.

More specifically, the Irish Volunteers were formed in 1913 in direct response to Edward Carson's Ulster Volunteer Force in the north.

Carson set up the Protestant UVF as an armed force which was prepared to use violence if the Home Rule Act was introduced in Ireland.

In a Gaelic League article entitled 'The North Began', Eoin MacNeill, called on Irish nationalists to form a force to demand Home Rule.

During the latter half of the 19th century, the Irish republican organisation, the IRB advocated armed revolt to break the connection with Britain and it was behind the abortive Fenian revolt of 1867.

The IRB had also been active in the 'Dynamite' campaign of the 1880s when Irish republicans, including one of the leaders of the 1916 Rising, Tom Clarke, had carried out a number of bomb attacks in Britain.

The IRB quickly infiltrated the fledgling Óglaigh na hÉireann (Irish Volunteers), its leadership seeing this as an opportunity to forge an army capable of carrying out an armed insurrection against British rule.

The Volunteer movement split following the beginning of the First World War, but the IRB continued its preparations for a rising.

As the Rising approached the IRB leadership, including Pádraig Pearse, forged an alliance with the armed workers' defence group, the Irish Citizen Army, led by socialist leader James Connolly.

By Easter Monday 1916 the rebel force, which attempted to overthrow British rule in Ireland, was made up of 1,300 Irish Volunteers and 200 members of the Irish Citizen Army and collectively, they were known as the 'Army of the Irish Republic'.

The increasingly repressive measures taken by the British government after the Rising drove the Irish Volunteers organisation underground, but military training, recruitment and procurement of arms gathered pace.

On the political front the republican Sinn Féin party won a decisive victory in the 1918 Westminster elections and it set up the First Dáil, a parliamentary body which proclaimed Irish independence.

On the day of the First Dáil's meeting in January 1919 a group of Irish volunteers at Soloheadbeg shot dead two members of the RIC in an act which became regarded as the starting point of the War for Independence which took the form of a guerilla campaign against police and military personnel from 1919 to 1921.

Volunteers took an oath of allegiance to the First Dáil. By 1919 the organisation was increasingly known as the Irish Republican Army.

The army fought a successful guerilla campaign until a truce in 1921 after which the Treaty, which split Ireland into the north, consisting of six counties and the Republic of Ireland in to the remaining 26, was signed by the IRA's Director of Intelligence, Michael Collins.

After the 1921 treaty the IRA split in to those who remained loyal to Michael Collins and those who supported Eamon de Valera.

As part of the Treaty, members of the Dáil had to take an oath of allegiance to the British crown, and it was that which divided the IRA.

The Collins camp argued the oath did not matter since "Ireland had achieved the freedom to achieve freedom".

As a result the majority of IRA volunteers took up the fight against the new 'Free State' and Michael Collins' new Free State army during the Irish Civil War of 1922-'23.

The Civil War ended in defeat for the IRA, with hundreds killed and thousands imprisoned after a vicious struggle.

Three years after the end of the Civil War De Valera resigned as president of Sinn Féin, set up Fianna Fáil and entered Dáil Éireann.

The IRA meanwhile refused to recognise the institutions of the new Irish Free State or the existence of the newly partitioned six-county northern state.

In the new unionist dominated Northern state the IRA saw its main role as defending nationalist communities from loyalist and police led pogroms.

Following the Civil War, defeated and demoralised, the IRA began slowly to reorganise. Under the leadership of Easter Rising veteran Sean Russell in the 1930s it prepared for a new English bombing campaign.

That campaign began in 1939 and continued into 1940 but the campaign was overshadowed by the beginning of the Second World War and a ruthless crackdown by De Valera's government in the South on republicans, which included the shooting of several republicans by Irish police.

The IRA campaign in Britain fizzled out, most of its membership languished in northern and southern jails and its headquarters staff had effectively ceased to exist.

By the late 1940s however, the IRA began to show signs of revival again. Óglaigh na hÉireann made plans for a new military campaign to remove the British occupation of Northern Ireland, but this time the campaign would be played out in the north, not Britain.

By 1956 the Border Campaign, as it became known, was well under way.

Fearing reprisals on nationalists from protestants in Belfast the IRA leadership restricted the campaign to areas outside of the city and it was fought mainly in the border counties of Fermanagh, Tyrone and Armagh.

A series of attacks on government and military installations was followed by the introduction of internment north and south of the border.

More significantly, public support on the ground was not as strong as anticipated with most northern Catholics ignoring the call to arms.

By 1962 the IRA leadership admitted defeat in the Border Campaign and ordered its units to dump its arms. Twelve people – six RUC men, six IRA men – died between 1956 and 1962.

The defeat sparked off years of debate in the IRA about its future direction. Its chief of staff Cahal Goulding wanted to move away from physical force and take the Republic Movement into radical politics.

However, events in the North in the late '60s overtook Goulding's drive to change the IRA.

Young, educated Northern nationalists began to demand an end to the institutionalised anti-Catholic discrimination which characterised the gerrymandered unionist dominated state.

In 1967 the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was formed. The Civil Rights Association demanded the scrapping of the rule that only property owners were allowed to vote in local council elections.

Businessmen and property owners, the vast majority of whom were Protestants, were given six votes while thousands of working-class Catholics, who did not own their own homes, were given no vote. Local councils had the power to issue state housing, and to appoint civil service jobs. Catholics were hugely underrepresented in the civil service and at senior levels right through industry.

NICRA also called for the scrapping of the gerrymandering voting process – where the number of council seats in unionist areas was beefed up to ensure unionist majorities on all the north's 26 councils – the disbandment of the exclusively Protestant B Specials police force and the removal of the Special Powers Act.

The civil rights campaign took to the streets but in October 1968 a peaceful civil rights march in Derry was attacked by RUC officers with batons. The scenes of blood-spattered campaigners attacked by batons and water cannon was filmed and shown all over the world.

The events of that day radicalised thousands of young nationalists. It also triggered off a series of pogroms which saw Catholics being forced to leave their homes in Protestant areas.

Following four days of serious rioting in Derry and Belfast in August 1969, then Northern Ireland Prime Minister, Major James Chichester Clark, called on the British government to send in British troops.

Police and loyalists had laid seige to several nationalist areas of Belfast. The peace line had been drawn, around 1,500 Catholic refugees were burnt out of their homes during the pogroms in Ardoyne, Bombay Street, Clonard district and the lower Falls.

Catholics built barricades to block off their streets, eight people were dead and hundreds injured.

The IRA had taken up its arms against the backdrop of the continuing violence against Catholics. In August 1969, the IRA famously possessed enough weaponry for one job – "one rifle, one Thompson submachine gun and two handguns".

Angry at how the IRA in the south had failed to organise a defence of their communities during the violence of that summer, the Belfast IRA withdrew its support from Dublin for some months.

"The IRA is fully committed to the goals of Irish unity and independence

Gerry Adams watches as an IRA guard fires a volley of shots over the coffin of Bobby Sands PHOTO:ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS/ARCHIVE

While the Dublin leadership were pushing ahead with plans to drop the abstentionism (from membership of the Dáil) other northern IRA members were seeking arms and ways to protect northern Catholics.

The IRA split into what became known as the Official IRA and, at first, the Provisionals.

As British troops rolled in to Belfast during 1969 and 1970, it was soon obvious they were not there to protect Catholics.

A resurgent IRA however, was involved in defending nationalist areas at Clonard, Ardoyne and Short Strand in June 1970 and young people began to flock to its ranks.

After the defence of these areas, one Lower Falls resident and former RAF serviceman was mowed down by a British Army tank as he tried to talk to soldiers. The British Army posted a cordon of soldiers around the Lower Falls and started searching and wrecking homes.

After a day and half of the 'Falls Curfew' residents were running out of food and provisions until, finally women had to venture across the cordon to bring supplies.

The IRA gradually moved from defensive operations to offensive and it shot dead the first British soldier to die in its new campaign, Gunner Curtis, in February 1971 in the New Lodge Road. It also launched a commercial bombing campaign in town centres.

The British government responded with the introduction of internment on August 9, 1971. On that morning hundreds of men had been arrested from their homes and imprisoned without trial, evidence, questioning or proof of having committed a crime.

Only nationalists were interned. Recruits to the IRA increased dramatically.

The IRA's ranks were further boosted following the murder of 14 civilians in Derry by British soldiers after a civil rights march protesting against internment.

Within weeks of Bloody Sunday the unionist government at Stormont collapsed and the north was directly ruled by the British government.

IRA attacks peaked in 1972 with over 100 British soldiers killed. In June 1972 it announced a truce and republican leaders, including Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, met representatives of the British government at a secret meeting.

Less than a fortnight later, a British Army operation codenamed "Motorman" saw hundreds of troops invade the no-go nationalist areas of Belfast and Derry. The army set up surveillance posts and the IRA was forced further underground.

More than 1,000 republicans were jailed and the IRA's military campaign with the British developed into a stalemate.

As British attempts to set up a power sharing administration involving unionists, the Alliance party and the SDLP collapsed in the face of the Loyalist Workers Strike of 1974, the IRA entered once again into talks with representatives of the British government late that year.

They entered into critical talks with the British over the withdrawal of troops from the north. The negotiations collapsed and, so too did the ceasefire in 1975.

The British introduced its new three track strategy of Criminalisation, Ulsterisation and Normalisation in an attempt to defeat the IRA.

This saw prisoners being tortured in Castlereagh and Gough Barracks, tried before non-jury Diplock courts, and denied political status in northern prisons. The locally-recruited RUC and UDR were pushed into the front line of the fight against the IRA and a huge propaganda effort was launched to deny the existence of political conflict.

The IRA responded to this by restructuring its organisation making it more difficult to infiltrate.

After British Secretary of State Roy Mason had claimed the British were squeezing the IRA like a "tube of toothpaste" it responded with a new wave of attacks in late 1978 and throughout 1979.

The IRA killed Lord Louis Mountbatten, a cousin of the Queen, who had a holiday home in Co Sligo in 1979. He died instantly when a 50 pound radio-controlled bomb exploded on his fishing boat.

The same day the IRA struck at the heart of the British establishment again when it detonated a radio-signalled bomb on the Warrenpoint Road, Co Down killing six British soldiers.

A further 12 soldiers were killed minutes later when a second bomb exploded.

The new conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher was determined to break the IRA by criminalising the prisoners refused political status and on the blanket protest in the new H-Blocks in Long Kesh.

For four years around 300 IRA and INLA prisoners refused to wear prison issue uniforms or clean their cells.

Realtives' groups and the newly organised Sinn Féin campaigned for the prisoners on the outside.

Street protests and marches were arranged, senior Catholic clergymen appealed to the British government to restore political status without success. As prison officers stepped up the beatings of prisoners the IRA made them a target and assassinated several officers. But the British would not move.

Eventually, the prisoners went on hunger strike, and when the first of the hunger strikers, Bobby Sands, died on May, 5 1981, support for the IRA sky-rocketed and Sinn Féin's profile was hugely advanced.

Bobby Sands was elected to Westminster during his hunger strike and hunger striker Kieran Doherty was elected as TD for Cavan/Monaghan while another prisoner Paddy Agnew was elected TD for Louth.

Ten men died on the hunger strike but the political landscape changed forever as a result.

Sinn Féin embarked on an electoral strategy in 1982 winning five seats in Assembly elections. The Republican Movement was now operating a twin-track strategy of armed struggle by the IRA and a strategy to build political strength by Sinn Féin.

The IRA's campaign continued in the North, but the battle had become a deadly war of attrition. It suffered its heaviest losses in one incident at Loughgall in Co Tyrone in 1987 when eight members of the East Tyrone Brigade were killed in an ambush.

It continued to inflict casualties on the British army, RUC and UDR, with some spectacular results, but the campaign seemed deadlocked.

Towards the end of the 1980s the IRA tried to up the ante by launching a sustained English and European bombing campaign while the campaign in the north was maintained.

Meanwhile the Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams began an engagement with SDLP leader John Hume, and he mapped out a route to peace in a publication called Pathway to Peace, at time when the conflict was still at its height.

The Sinn Féin leadership expanded on this strategy in the early '90s in a document called Towards a Lasting Peace which signposted many of the changes in republican thinking about how to bring the conflict to a conclusion.

The IRA also engaged in a series of secret meetings with a British government representative over a three-year period up to 1993.

By then Gerry Adams and John Hume had sent a joint document to the British and Irish governments which set out the nationalist position and which suggested that a peaceful resolution to the conflict could be found.

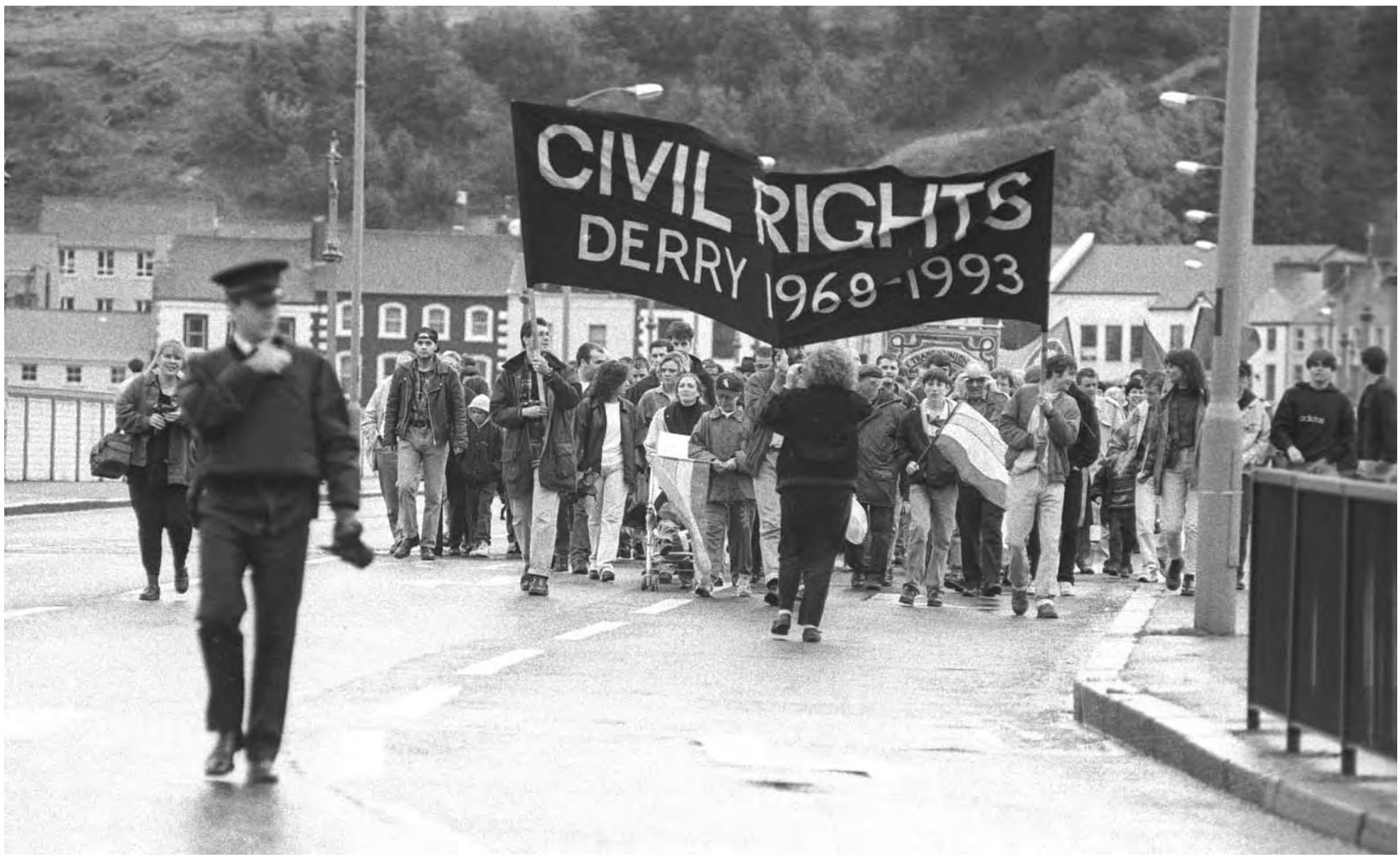
The nationalist leaders had the private support of Irish Taoiseach Albert Reynolds for this initiative, which paved the way for the IRA's cessation of military operations in 1994, which began the slow process of negotiation which led to yesterday's historic statement.

and to building the Republic outlined in the 1916 Proclamation *IRA Statement* ”

A nationalist rally reaches the City Hall in Belfast in 1995. PHOTO: MAL McCANN

Nationalist protesters turn their backs on the Apprentice Boys as they walk on the Derry walls in 1996.
PHOTO: JARLATH KEARNEY

Bogside Residents protest against the Apprentice Boys' march in 1997. PHOTO: JARLATH KEARNEY



A Civil Rights commemoration march taking place in Derry in 1993 crosses Craigavon Bridge PHOTO: JARLATH KEARNEY

Bishop Edward Daly, carrying a bloodstained handkerchief, and Civil Rights demonstrators attempt to get a wounded man to safety while surrounded by Paras in the Bogside on Bloody Sunday.

BLOODY SUNDAY:

Lethal state force had to be met

When General Robert Ford, the British Army's commander of land forces in 1972, watched as the troops of 1 Para stormed the Bogside on Bloody Sunday, the Irish Republican Army in Derry was in a fairly weak state.

The Provisional IRA's campaign had been running for three years. Within the nationalist community in the North's second city, it enjoyed only patchy support.

As night fell on January 30, 1972 and news of the deaths of 13 civilians – a 14th would die a few months later – was absorbed in homes in the Bogside, Creggan and Brandywell and other nationalist heartlands, it began to become clear that the IRA's meaning and role was about to alter significantly.

The Parachute Regiment's assault on a Civil Rights march in an urban area was a fateful miscalculation by the British military.

The 'arrest' plan on the day had been carefully designed to suck the IRA into a military confrontation on the streets of the Bogside.

But the IRA did not take the bait.

Glenfada Park – one of the main killing grounds on Bloody Sunday – had been pinpointed by General Ford and his commanders as the area most likely to contain IRA volunteers.

Favoured by the IRA for launching attacks, Glenfada Park was largely screened from British army lookout posts perched high on Derry's walls.

It was there that Ford and Colonel Wilford's pincer movement would entrap armed IRA men.

However, IRA volunteers were present only in a civilian capacity on Bloody Sunday having acceded to requests from the Civil Right's march organisers.

The killing of unarmed civilians with brutal precision both shocked and enraged nationalists across Ireland, and populations in countries world-wide.

The response was predictable. The IRA became the last resort of the nationalist people. For the youth of Derry and elsewhere, seeing the deaths of teenagers and young people, Jack Duddy (17) Hugh Gilmour (17), John Young (17), Kevin McIlhenney (17), Michael McDaid (20) and William Nash (19) - gave fire to a burning sense of revenge. The lethal British military operation on January 30, 1972, would spur many young men and women to react in kind across the North.

Ill-equipped and struggling for support, the Provisional IRA was all of a sudden seen as a genuine response against a British government that chose to seek a military solution to a social and political problem.

At the time, many of the young men who swelled the ranks of the IRA had no other motive than avenging an attack on innocent people.

For them it was a natural, legitimate reaction.

Bloody Sunday would become a catalyst in modern Irish history, fulfilling WB Yeat's prediction in his poem Easter 1916:

"Now and in time to be, Wherever green is worn, all changed, changed utterly: A terrible beauty is born."

The 'terrible beauty' would eventually take the form of prison protests, violence and a deep sense of comradeship and Yeat's words would be borne out across the six counties.

For John Kelly, brother of Michael shot dead by paras in the Bogside on Bloody Sunday, the day marked a "death of innocence".

"As we all know there were queues to join the IRA after that day," he says.

"I have always said and maintained that the paras were responsible for countless deaths that day, including soldiers, policemen and everyone who died during the Troubles.

"Many young people in Derry and across the North lost their lives through ending up in prison.

"The paras not only murdered people that day, but they carry the responsibility of the blood that was spilled since. For the youth, they were angry and the people became angry and determined.

"The paras stole the youth and they are responsible for deaths that occurred right across the board. I have always said that."

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"The paras stole the youth and they are responsible for deaths that occurred right across the board. I've always said that."

- John Kelly

"We all know, there were queues to join the IRA after that day" - *Kelly*

Joe Cahill with SF leaders at Dunville Park in May 1997 PHOTO: MAL McCANN

Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams is held aloft following his 1983 election success. PHOTO: ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS/ARCHIVE

Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams and Pat Doherty protest at Stormont in 1997 after being refused entry. PHOTO: MAL McCANN

Bertie Ahern visits west Belfast December 1997 and meets Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams. PHOTO: MAL McCANN

Gerry Adams addresses a rally in 1986. PHOTO: ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS/ARCHIVE

"...seize this opportunity and make Irish freedom a reality - *GerryAdams*"

Terry Enright Snr beside a stone cairn on Black Mountain dedicated to the memory of his son Terry who was murdered by loyalists in 1998 PHOTO: MAL McCANN

TERRY ENRIGHT:

Ordinary people fighting injustice

All politics is local. Terry Enright is proof of that. He is not an MLA, TD or councillor, yet he is one of the people that has spearheaded community activism in the North.

The devastating murder of his son Terry Jnr by loyalist gunmen in 1998 failed to deter that activism, instead strengthening his resolve to achieve his goals through grass-roots community work.

In the context of yesterday's historic statement from the IRA, Mr Enright has said there is an immediate need for republicans to create a holistic grass-roots movement that would seek the equality and human rights not yet delivered by the Good Friday Agreement.

A chat with Mr Enright in his west Belfast home opens up a treasure chest of anecdotes about his work in a plethora of community groups.

A former Long Kesh internee, Mr Enright was one of the first community activists to devise and take part in practical cross-community projects in Belfast.

"Nationalists and republicans have been very content to let Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness argue out issues at the level they are arguing them out," said Mr Enright.

"However, I believe that a movement similar to the civil rights movement is needed. We need community groups to complement everything that they are doing at that level.

"What we need is a groundswell of people saying that not much changed for them since the Good Friday Agreement."

Mr Enright said he believed people on the ground in nationalist areas across the North were still subjected to inequality.

"There is still so much to be done in terms of the Good Friday Agreement. Perhaps the biggest example of that is the fact that, to all intents and purposes, institutionalised sectarianism is still a major part of this state," he said.

"There has been a steady programme to undermine Sinn Féin. On one hand, they have been given acceptability, yet in the background there have been people in the civil service constructively working against those gains that have been made in terms of equality.

"There is now a situation whereby basic issues such as civil rights and people's right to have a job have been totally undermined."

Mr Enright also drew attention to the distribution of Invest Northern Ireland funds.

He highlighted the lack of sanctions set up to combat breaches of fair employment legislation as one of the issues that have to be addressed.

The Upper Springfield Development Trust, the trade union Unison, the National Trust, the Belfast Hills Partnership, the Black Mountain Environmental Group, the Equality Coalition and the Human Rights Consortium are just some of the groups for which Mr Enright works tirelessly.

"For many years, I have been involved in trying to save the Belfast hills. That is just another example of ordinary people trying to fight against injustice, corruption and the ability of the state to do what they want," he said.

Whether it's immersing himself in the battle to save the Belfast hills or working to get a better deal for the people of north and west Belfast, Mr Enright said community activism was an essential part of the way forward for nationalism.

In the context of the IRA statement, he said: "There is an obligation on the republican movement to set up further political education about this stage of the struggle.

"There is so much happening in communities that republicans can get involved in. I am vice-chairman of the Upper Springfield Development Trust that has brought people together to organise themselves around social and economic issues.

"People need to realise that these issues are all human-rights issues that have to be tied into a broader context. There is a necessity for people to raise their perspectives about these issues and seek justice and equality and move things forward."

Mr Enright maintained that the IRA statement would not necessarily mean an immediate move by the Democratic Unionist Party back to the negotiating table "so people need to act now themselves at local level to make things better".

He said there was still a place for former IRA volunteers in the broader political struggle.

"It is okay for Sinn Féin to have a strategy of how they are going to deal with future political gains," he said.

"However, those people who now find themselves with little or nothing to do should realise that there are lots of roles for them.

"You don't have to be a politician. There are lots of other things you can get involved in and you don't have to be contented with just treading water.

"In community activism, everything you do is political.

"While community workers may not be members of Sinn Féin or the SDLP, they are all working to try and change people's lives."

Drawing parallels with the civil rights struggle in the North in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Mr Enright said: "Just as the civil rights movement played an important role for people, there is now a similar role now for people to work around issues of equality and human rights.

"I hope that people will come more politicised and carry forward this strategy."

Mr Enright's son Terry Jnr was shot dead by Loyalist Volunteer Force gunmen as he worked as a doorman at a Belfast nightclub on January 11, 1998. Terry Jnr was also a well-respected community worker.

In his memory, the Enright family set up the Terry Enright Foundation, an organisation promoting cross-community youth work.

Terry Enright Snr said: "I believe that Terry's killing made us stronger. The personal loss was very difficult for all the family but I believe that it strengthened our resolve, made us much stronger and more determined."

The younger Terry played for the local Gort na Móna Gaelic Athletic Club, which later named its new pitch after him.

His father has carried on his memory through community activism.

As the republican struggle moves into a new phase, Mr Enright said such activism was the way forward for nationalists across the North.

> "In community activism, everything you do is political" *-Terry Enright*

Mary Nelis addresses a rally in Belfast in the early 80s and (facing page) Mary in more recent times PHOTOS: ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS/ARCHIVE/ MAL MCCANN

A child plays by a burnt out van on the Falls Road in 1981. PHOTO: ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS/ARCHIVE

RUC men and British soldiers block the sidestreets into Belfast city centre to prevent nationalists from marching to the City Hall. PHOTO: ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS/ARCHIVE

The aftermath of the release of Private Lee Clegg in 1995 saw street violence. PHOTO: MAL McCANN

Mary Nelis, a Derry-based former assembly member for Sinn Féin, looks back on her life within the republican community.

A family built on a shared belief

BY EAMONN HOUSTON
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It became an iconic image of the prison protests of the late 1970s. Three women, barefoot and clad only in grey blankets, stood outside Derry's St Eugene's Cathedral on a freezing cold December day. They bore placards with the simple inscription – "Do you care?"

One of the three women was a then 40-year-old Mary Nelis, a woman thrust into what she still describes today as "a horror story".

It marked the biggest statement of what became known as the blanket protest. Nelis, a Creggan mother of nine and now aged 69, had been a community activist — a troubleshooter for those who found themselves unable to deal with the paperwork of day-to-day society. Active in tenants' associations and an energetic servant of the community, Mary Nelis would have the very fabric of her beliefs first tested and then destroyed.

The arrest of her then 18-year-old son Donncha in 1976 was the point that would change Nelis' life forever.

In recent years, she distinguished herself as an outspoken Sinn Féin assembly member and a staunch defender of women's rights. During the course of the Troubles, Nelis' place in society would be upended. She confesses that, at some points of her life during the last 30 years, she thought she had lost her sanity.

"Politically, I got dragged into Sinn Féin. Donncha was one of the first arrested after the removal of political status in the prisons. He was held for seven days, and I couldn't get to see him," she says.

"When people describe the republican movement as a family, that is accurate. There is a sense of comradeship, support. Sure, we have our disputes and fallouts just like any other family. But the republican family remains the finest and most sensitive family. No one feels isolated. I have not one single regret. I feel good to be alive."

A meeting with the then assistant RUC commander in Derry, Frank Lagan, lit the touchpaper for Nelis' subsequent involvement in the republican movement.

She says Lagan had asked her to ask her son where he had got the gun with which he had been arrested.

"Something instinctive told me right then, right at that moment, that there was something wrong. That one incident changed my whole life. That was the beginning of my understanding of the system," she says.

Mary Nelis says that, while her son Donncha was in the H-blocks, she had "no notion" of what Sinn Féin meant or who was involved in the movement.

She had been active in inquiring about young men on the behalf of their mothers. She would have been a familiar face at the British army base at Bligh's Lane in Creggan.

As a mother, she cared only about the plight of her teenage son in prison.

"He was trying to prepare me for whatever. That was around the time that they did not recognise the courts. He told me in no uncertain terms that he would not recognise the court.

"He was to be sentenced to 16 years and he was clear in his own mind that he would serve them.

"I remember visiting him and they had shaved his head and he looked terrible. I nearly had a nervous breakdown. It was a horror story," she says.

Prisoners refusing to wear the prison uniform were refused visits. For the mothers on the outside, there was a heartbreaking feeling of powerlessness.

"They treated us like dirt," Mary Nelis remembers. On the outside, Nelis suddenly found herself isolated. Lifelong friends passed her on the street. Her belief system as a Catholic was upended.

She would not speak to the bishop of Derry, Edward Daly, for 25 years.

"I felt powerless and very alone. My whole belief system was overturned and, in many ways, I felt a deep sense of betrayal.

"Our wee boys were on the blocks. I expected the church to be our defenders but they hung them out to dry."

The iconic protest outside the cathedral was a spontaneous act, according to Nelis.

"Kathleen Deeny, Theresa Deery and I just made the placards and did it.

"The only person who gave us support on that freezing day in December 1976 was the local barber, Andy McGarvey.

"It was said later that what we did was the biggest political statement."

That protest would later appear on the Champs-Élysées in Paris and would travel to Europe and the United States. However, people were "scared" to become involved. Mothers were worried about the politicising of their sons. They worried about prison and all that this entailed in the late 1970s.

The prison protests met with an unbending British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. The intransigence of the "Iron Lady" forced the issue further.

"As mothers, girlfriends and wives, we didn't have a political axe to grind. The efforts of the Armagh Committee with Bernadette Devlin still couldn't prevent the hungerstrike."

By this time, Mary Nelis was becoming part of a bigger family — the republican family.

"In many ways, I feel sorry for the rest of the family during those times. My family paid a price for me supporting a justice and human-rights issue.

"I remember going to see my son and feigning a smile when he sat before me with long hair and a beard. They had no mirrors so they didn't know what way they looked. It was horrific."

At 1.17am on Tuesday, May 5, 1981, after 65 days on hungerstrike, Bobby Sands MP died in the H-block prison hospital at Long Kesh.

"I cried like a waterfall," Mary Nelis recalls. "I cried like he was my own son."

She quickly joined Sinn Féin. "There was a huge raft of people that had become politicised. Everybody was joining Sinn Féin. The hungerstrike was the catalyst for us all.

"It was a logical progression. We always knew that the problems of this island would have to be solved politically.

"Young people made choices, very deliberate ones, especially after Bloody Sunday. They were realists.

"They knew exactly what was in front of them because the regime was so harsh.

"The IRA is advancing the progress of peace. You cannot measure things in terms of what you've got. Globally, things have changed.

"When people describe the republican movement as a family, that is accurate. There is a sense of comradeship, support. Sure, we have our disputes and fallouts just like any other family.

"But the republican family remains the finest and most sensitive family. No one feels isolated. I have not one single regret. I feel good to be alive."

Nelis says she believes that proactive intervention by the Catholic church, business professionals and the government in Dublin could have prevented "at least half" of the deaths that occurred during the course of the Troubles.

"It wouldn't have happened had they challenged the political and social establishment," she says.

"...that was the beginning of my understanding of the system" - *Nelis*

The RUC move in to clear the way for Orangemen to march down the Garvaghy Road in 1997 PHOTO: MAL McCANN

Bobby Storey takes part in a protest on the Cliftonville Road in 1997 PHOTO: JARLATH KEARNEY

A protest on the Andersonstown Road in 1996 calling for the RUC to disband PHOTO: MAL McCANN

Nationalists were barred from entering Lurgan town centre in 1996 PHOTO: MAL McCANN

A large parade supporting the blanket men and women on the Falls road in 1980 PHOTO: ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS/ARCHIVE

Times are moving on

For some of the North's youngest inhabitants, the turbulent days of the Troubles are something they associate with textbooks and anecdotes from older friends and family members.

Thankfully for them they have had the fortune to grow up in times of relative peace and have not been adversely affected by the conflict.

Daniel Lundy is not one of those young people.

Along with his four siblings, Daniel has had to grow up in Ardoyne, north Belfast, without his father, Alan, the last Sinn Féin member to be shot dead before the historic IRA ceasefire in 1994.

Reflecting on the latest IRA statement, Mr Lundy said: "Times are moving on and things have to move forward. However, all the killings and collusion can't just be forgotten about. You can't just move on and forget about them. They always need to be on the table."

The 24-year-old insisted: "I really don't think that nationalists will ever let these killings be forgotten about and they will always try to get them solved."

Alan Lundy was gunned down by the UFF while working at the house of Sinn Féin councillor Alex Maskey in Andersonstown in May 1993.

Alan, from Ardoyne in north Belfast, was helping Mr Maskey build a porch on his house to help provide additional security at the time of his death.

Gunmen drove up to the house in a red Ford Orion, firing a number of shots before chasing him inside the house where they shot him in the back in front of Mr Maskey's children.

The gunmen then went upstairs and searched the bedrooms but did not find Mr Maskey.

This was only one of a number of attempts on Mr Maskey's life as he had previously been wounded when a UFF gunman shot him at close range in the stomach with a shotgun.

Recalling the horrific day when his father was murdered, Mr Lundy said: "I was 12-years-old when my dad was killed and I can still remember that day clearly.

"It was a Saturday evening around six o'clock and I was sitting on the street playing with my friends when a priest went up to our door. A few minutes later I could hear my mother screaming and I knew straight away that my dad had been killed."

Daniel is the second oldest in the family. His mother was left to rear him and his brothers Alan Jnr and Ciaran, and his sisters Claire and Elizabeth, alone.

"I can remember my dad so well. He used to be coming home from work and I'd run down the street to meet him.

"It is still hard to this day to accept that he is dead. It is especially hard when you see other mates going for a drink with their dad knowing that we just can't do that.

"He used to take us over to Celtic matches every other week before he died and then we weren't able to do that after his murder."

"It's good to show people that those who have been killed have not been forgotten about and that they are still cared about. It's also still very important to try and find out the truth about what happened to them."

Daniel also recalls the increased harassment from British Crown forces which he received after his father's murder.

"From I was around 15-years-old to about 18 or 19, everywhere I went I was getting stopped and searched in the street.

"They'd drive past, get out of the jeep and stop me, saying things like 'that's Alan Lundy's son'. One time in Etna Drive they grabbed me, threw me against the jeep, arrested me and charged me with resisting arrest and assaulting police. The case was later dropped, but that was the kind of general harassment," he says.

However, like many others affected by the conflict Daniel is determined to have his voice heard.

A conference affording young people with a chance to tell their stories about how collusion has affected their lives is taking place in St Mary's College on the Falls Road, Belfast, next Thursday.

Mr Lundy, who will participate in this conference, said: "I think the Youth for Truth conference is a good idea. People want to find out the truth about all those cases that haven't been solved.

"It's good to show people that those who have been killed have not been forgotten about and that they are still cared about. It's also still very important to try and find out the truth about what happened to them."

Mr Lundy is convinced there was British state collusion in his father's death.

"There was definitely collusion involved in his killing. He was working on Alex Maskey's house and they were very good friends. As they worked together, there was photos taken of them by the police and he had been stopped on the way to work on the house.

"On the day he was killed there was police all over the street and about half an hour before he was killed the police disappeared."

When asked if he ever gets the sense that his father's murder will be forgotten about he said: "I must say that to this day my father is talked about everywhere I go, especially in Ardoyne. People come up to me and say that he was a gentleman.

"You can never say never, but I really think that it is too late for somebody to be got for his killing. His death hit everybody in the whole family circle really bad as he was just one of those people that everybody likes. That was shown by the massive crowd at his funeral."

Daniel Lundy welcomes the IRA's moves towards peace saying progress is inevitable while mindful of the fact that those who have been killed should never be forgotten.

"People want to find out the truth about unsolved cases - *Daniel Lundy*"

A support rally for the women prisoners in Armagh Jail in 1981. ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS/ARCHIVE

A Saoirse protest in Crossmaglen in 1998. PHOTO: MAL McCANN

A sign highlighting the dangers of British army spyposts in south Armagh. PHOTO: MAL McCANN

A Saoirse protest calling for the release of republican prisoners in 1997. PHOTO: JARLATH KEARNEY

Sinn Féin youth take their protest to south Armagh spyposts in 1997. PHOTO: MAL McCANN

TERRY CROSSAN:

'Struggle entering hopeful phase'

"I met many good friends from all over the country and have many good memories, but also sad ones - especially the death of Martin Hurson on the 1981 hungerstrike."

BY EAMONN HOUSTON
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Terry Crossan to this day remembers the town-land of Aughnaskea in Co Tyrone. It was the home of Martin Hurson, a young man he was to befriend and remember.

Crossan had never been to Aughnaskea, but its name is embedded in his head.

Martin Hurson was the sixth of ten men to die on hunger strike in Long Kesh prison in 1981. Crossan breaks into a fond smile when he recalls the camaraderie he enjoyed with the young country man.

Crossan joined the Provisional IRA in the weeks that followed Bloody Sunday. By his own admittance, he had no notion, nor care for politics.

Now at the age of 50, Crossan is fully supportive of the republican movement's momentum towards a new chapter. For Crossan, the war is not yet over, but simply entering a new and more hopeful phase.

Crossan was arrested with Sinn Féin chief negotiator, Martin McGuinness, in the latter's sister's home in 1976. The pair had been childhood friends. To this day they enjoy fishing trips as a hobby.

Crossan would spend six years in the cages of Long Kesh for 'conspiracy to cause explosions in the United Kingdom'.

Martin McGuinness would be released a few weeks later after their arrest.

"Bloody Sunday was the catalyst for me – that, I suppose, brought me to believe that I should play a more proactive role in the struggle against occupation and for justice."

Crossan sits in a bar – of which he is proprietor – adorned with images of Derry during the early days of the Troubles.

"When my parents found out that I was involved, they blamed poor Barney McFadden [a veteran Derry republican] - who of course was totally innocent - but still he got the blame."

For Crossan, the prison years formed an important part of his development, as a person, and a politically aware republican.

"While difficult times for my wife and family, prison had no lasting negative effects on me personally. For me it was a place to learn tolerance and respect. I also learned my native language which I now speak on a daily basis.

"I met many good friends from all over the country and have many good memories, but also sad ones - especially the death of Martin Hurson on the 1981 hungerstrike.

"He was a good friend. I met Martin while on remand and remember well some of his great stories."

Crossan describes his motivation to join the Provisional IRA as a response to a series of events.

"I suppose it was more of a reactionary thing than something that was motivated by any sort of political ideology. I had come through the Civil Rights period and witnessed the burning of my grandmother's home in William Street by the RUC and B-Specials. I also remember the attack on Sammy Devenny – a neighbour of ours – by the same people."

On April 19, 1969, the Devenny family were assaulted by the RUC in their William Street home. Three months later, Sammy Devenny died as a result of the brutal beating.

Within weeks, the resulting tension would help spark the Battle of the Bogside.

Crossan says: "There were no republican links in my family. My grandmother was of Church of Ireland stock and for a time did housekeeper at the old Lecky Road barracks.

"During the early 1960s, policemen on duty would have called to my granny's house for a cuppa and there was no sense of animosity towards them. The events of Duke Street and Burntollet would change all that."

On October 5, 1968, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association had intended to march from Duke Street in Derry's Waterside to Derry city centre. As the march assembled the Royal Ulster Constabulary batoned demonstrators in the glare of the world's media. Events at Duke Street forcefully hit home with nationalist youth.

As would events at the close of a People's Democracy march from Belfast to Derry in January 1969. The marchers would endure a sustained and brutal attack from loyalists at Burntollet bridge, while the RUC looked on. Some of the marchers were reportedly tossed into the nearby River Faughan.

Crossan recalls: "I remember the early days of the Troubles and the emergence of the Provisional IRA and the 'stickies' too. It took me a while to know the difference, but I often lay in bed and listened to the crack of bullets and the pinging across to the old BSR factory, where the British Army was based. At that time I had a quiet admiration for these people."

Today Crossan finds himself able to accept the current process - but in pragmatic terms. "It is very clear to me that the republican movement has evolved to become a powerful political force on the island. We are very much admired by other revolutionary groups world-wide. Armed force is a means to an end and, personally, I feel that the armed struggle was one facet of a wider struggle that continues. I see great challenges ahead and I feel that the leadership of the movement has done great work in maintaining unity while at the same time preparing for great change."

But for Crossan, the family he knows as the 'republican family' will always remain intact as will his memories of Martin Hurson.

"Republican movement has become a powerful political force" - *Crossan*

PERCUSSION: A girl bangs a bin lid on the ground outside Woodburn barracks in west Belfast in 1997. PHOTO: JARLATH KEARNEY

CYCLIST: Campaigning in west Belfast for Sinn Féin's Danny Morrison in 1983. PHOTO: ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS/ARCHIVE

SHOW TRIALS: Protesters call for an end to show trials at a demonstration on north Belfast's Crumlin Road outside the crown court in 1985. PHOTO: ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS/ARCHIVE

BARRACKS: A demonstration against the RUC at Rosemount barracks in Derry in 1995. PHOTO: JARLATH KEARNEY

Daily Ireland reporter Ciarán Barnes reflects on what the IRA statement means for him and other young people in the North

Milestone can transform lives

CIARÁN **BARNES**
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The year 1995 was a great year for me. I turned 16, got up close and personal with a 'laydee' for the first time, and enjoyed a full year of relative peace. I remember sitting in the Waterworks Park in north Belfast with a group of teenage friends, drinking cheap cider and waxing lyrical about how good things were.

Living all my life less than 100 yards from the city's Oldpark Road interface, I was not so much touched as punched by the Troubles.

Thankfully, I never lost a family member but an uncle was shot, friends were murdered and blown up and a number of relatives did some serious jail time.

Because of this, I initially treated the 1994 ceasefires with scepticism.

However, I quickly came to realise that the times were indeed changing and, by the summer of 1995, Belfast was a much better place.

My biggest wish is that, following yesterday's IRA statement, kids turning 16 in 2005 can harbour the same feelings of hope I did turning 16 a decade ago.

To be able to stand on the corner of the Oldpark Road in 1995 or in a bar or a bookie's and not worry about being shot was amazing.

Before the ceasefires, when I called into my local — aptly nicknamed the Suicide because of its peace-line location — to watch Celtic, I would stand behind a concrete pillar.

I was always paranoid about gunmen but, in 1995, I felt I didn't have to hide behind posts any more. It was these small things that were the most noticeable and ultimately life-changing.

In the same way that the ceasefires transformed my teenage years, confirmation the IRA is to go away will alter the lives of thousands of kids throughout the North.

Sure, there will still be sectarian violence, rioting at contentious parades and people getting kickings because of their religion or the soccer team they support.

But not having the IRA around sets the North on the road to normality.

It also effectively destroys the Ulster Defence Association and Ulster Volunteer Force as paramilitary forces. What reason do they have to exist now? There is no one left to fight. Hopefully this statement also means that a measure of the political pressure applied to the IRA in recent years will now be applied to those currently shooting and bombing on the North's streets.

Later on today, I'm going to call into the Suicide and, with it being builders' pay day, the majority of my mates, who are scaffolders and brickies, will be in.

We're all the same age, we all come from the same backgrounds, we were all in our teens in 1995, and we'll all agree that July 28, 2005 is a historic day. To tell the truth, it's a milestone because none of us has known life minus the Provos.

Writing this, I'm experiencing the same emotions I did after the 1994 ceasefires — uncertainty, doubt and a hint of scepticism. But if 1995 is anything to go by, I'm quietly confident that these feelings will have been replaced by a newfound optimism come next year.

I just hope every 16-year-old across the North feels the same.

COLLUSION: A rally against collusion goes down west Belfast's Falls Road. PHOTO: MAL McCANN

FUNERAL: Gerry Adams at a funeral in May 1987
PHOTO: ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS/ARCHIVE

GIBRALTAR THREE: Hearses carry the IRA volunteers Daniel McCann, Mairéad Farrell and Seán Savage along west Belfast's Andersonstown Road in 1988. PHOTO: ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS/ARCHIVE

> "Newfound optimism will replace hint of scepticism" – *Ciarán Barnes*


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HISTORY AWAITS ON IRA MOVE