

Opening Statement

Given the events of the past weeks in Belfast and elsewhere in Northern Ireland, it is necessary to take some pause and reflect again on where we all are. Some consideration was given to assessing whether this low-key event in the public sphere is helpful at this moment. We consider that it adds to the Proposal's imminent relevance. We hope and consider that the conciliatory approach shows the relevance, which is even more acutely demonstrated by the continuing tensions in our beautiful island and, in particular, in its magnificent North. Throughout the course of this long journey to peace there have been many courageous initiatory events not least the acceptance of the Good Friday Agreement itself. We suggest that Ireland North and South yearns to complete the steps to establish an enduring peace for generations to come.

Following the stand of the Solidarnosc Trade Union in Gdansk in Poland some forty years ago a populist movement began for democracy in Czechoslovakia. Vaclav Havel, then a renowned Playwrite and dissident was held in captivity but soon to become President while the people assembled in mass demonstration in Prague. The Communist party had sent to Moscow for support. which was understood then from bitter experience to mean tanks, troops and sivil suppression. There is a story that Michael Gorbachov arrived at the government buildings in a motorcade to confer with the Prime MInister and senior officials, as they assumed to provide the promise to quell the peaceful unrest. Gorbachov left his car and instead of ascending the steps walked to the barricades and told those in the front line that he was with them. And the single gesture, an act of communication with its firm decision catalysed the move to end the Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. We suggest that our present time, the stagnation of the GFA process, the risks of more worthless street disturbances beg for an acceleration of the activities that can deliver lasting peace, that can get us past the obstructions in the river of our destiny to true cooperation on this island. All the peoples of the Earth need and want Ireland to have enduring peace.

Speaking directly, our political culture does not readily embrace the word love, yet that human and times superhuman quality that is love is not only potent in itself but is also the antidote to fear and anger, and it is the pathway to wisdom. Its close ally and

progeny, forgiveness is a challenge to anyone. Still, it has the active force to move an individual, a community, and society. I include each of us personally in this, forgiveness has the force to move us from hurt, grief and past injustices, not necessarily immediately but over time. In that spirit, we have humble pleasure in presenting what we have named The Proposal. It is not the Gorbachov moment but it can lead to it or some event or series of events that can lead to a serious settlement of all out major differences on the basis of our invitation, it is our oar in the water of the ship of our collective destiny. Sometimes the practice of love is manifest in the form of delicate diplomacy. It is precisely this approach that we now advocate both in this conversation and the actual text of the Proposal <https://theproposal.info/> which I am assuming that you all may have read or will read in full. I ask you to do so with an open mind and discerning heart.

Its central recommendation is the obvious one of inviting talks with significant figures with community representatives of all sides, beginning with unionist leaders and influential ones in what these decent folk refer to themselves as the PUL. It is for the elected authorities in governance to do so. Those of us in the voluntary sector and there are many hundreds, if not thousands, will assist wherever possible in fomenting an atmosphere of conciliation. The intervention of community workers and adults in Lanark Way on Wednesday and Thursday nights to persuade many of the younger rioters to desist and go home is one of the encouraging features of the past fortnight. Adults formed a human chain on the Springfield Road which has practical effect and potent symbolism. Still, we have no choice but to remain vigilant and encourage reconciliation, as I am sure you will all agree.

The conciliatory approach, while the essence of The Proposal, however, is not its inspiration. The Inspiration is the realisation that the creation of an entirely new state is not only feasible but provides the best possible approach to the future of relations and administration on this beautiful, enchanting island where we are fortunate to reside and bide some or all of our short enough terms of years. It is also the guardian and guarantor of the identity and the participation of those of the unionist tradition, which is copper-fastened by the role of a new body with international input and guidance in which their particular, position heritage and identity and heritage can be virulently represented and defended into the future.

I have developed an increasing empathy to the unionism family's whole position as I long for the coming together for everyone in or on our island, embracing the entirety of history, referencing all of the mythology, and above all celebrating the possibilities of a shared future on a shared island, however, we may be governed. Our present situation seems well characterised by two commentaries on the current situation. The first from Mick Fealty, editor of the terrific Slugger O'Toole news and commentary website, which has an online following of tens of thousands.

<https://sluggerotoole.com>

Mick observes and then quotes American Yale Professor and author [Timothy Snyder | Department of History](#)

'Whether it's unionism or nationalism doing it, disruption does not represent control any more than it represents a destiny.' (Mick Fealty 11th April)

...the whole notion of disruption is adolescent. It assumes that after the teenagers make a mess, the adults will come and clean it up. But there are no adults. We own this mess.'

- [On Tyranny](#), Professor Tim Snyder a work on the experience of the Trump Presidency

The second commentary is deeply poignant in the present atmosphere. It has personal resonance as I had an internship with the Belfast Telegraph during a year's journalism training in 2012 and met the Author of the following comments, Gail Walker, during that stint. She has since been editor for five years and is now editor at large. This appeared in a strong opinion article in Saturday's edition. Gail does not offer an exploration of a New Nation or any other engagement with the south. There are no presumed outcomes, and that is the risk we all take in setting out on a new road; there is give and receive, receive and give and all of us are changed, sometimes changed utterly. The challenge initially is to explore the destinations, all of them, bearing in mind that Scotland's position and capacity of the UK to survive its departure is clearly under question as we await also census results and another imminent Political poll from the Lucid Poll Agency.

'Being a unionist isn't easy in a place where people are constantly being told it's a numbers game and the egg-timer of history is running out. When people think they're being defeated, they get scared, and they get angry..... People here are easily wound up. Sectarianism is rife. Bigotry surfaces quickly. Social media has brought us a whole new riot experience - the first Twitter Translink Bus Burning with drone footage.....The past few days have reminded most people what really matters. They want peace and to get on with their lives. They want to live in a normal place where no one is above the law...There is an opportunity right now for leadership to occur, from within the main unionist blocs. It remains to be seen if there is any individual with sufficient ambition or vision to say the few important sentences which would transform the unionist future..... It's about owning the future, not harking back to old grievances or using old methods to highlight them. We have learned to hang together and not hang separately. Everybody here should be able to have a good standard of living. Most people would rather have this place work than not work.... It's time for unionism to start talking about that on every street corner. And that means in every part of west Belfast and all over the island and in London. See the full article on this link.

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/columnists/gail-walker/opportunity-now-for-leadership-to-emerge-in-unionism-to-embrace-the-future-but-does-anyone-have-the-vision-40295385.html>

Gail does not offer an exploration of a New Nation or any specific engagement with the south. If anything, she probably wants things to remain as they are constitutionally, but it is also implicit in what she also says that they actually can't. There are no presumed outcomes, We can explore the destinations, all of them, evaluate them together, and then perhaps negotiate. There is no life event in family, business, club or public structure, national, international or local community, a legal case where in a situation of difference let alone outright division that you would not want to go and talk to the other person or group, sound them out, arrange a mediator or intermediary, go-between whatever. Please do not ask so much why we would do such a thing, and I ask from a heartfelt concern for all of the people on this island for their present and their future, and mindful of the past, why would

we not? Why would we not speak to each other, all of us and soon? To quote my late father often used exhortation, 'Get on with it.'

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