

## NORTHERN IRELAND 2018: Where do we go from here?

Thank you for the invitation. I know Derry well as I am married to a local. If you marry one Derry person you marry forty.

I have spoken in the city many times. I pointed this out once and quipped 'I must be good'. A voice from the back spoke up 'No, son you're cheap!'

I have had very positive experiences working with St. Columb's Park House and members of all communities. We worked on the study of the protestant population and its inclusion within the city. Studied city of culture and worked on anti-poverty issues. I have found the city welcoming and among those I worked with a desire to move on.

My father used to work in the city every Monday and Tuesday, he stayed in the old City Hotel. He drank with Alex Orr and Spider Kelly.

I remember sitting in the Milanda Bakery listening to friends of my father telling him in hushed tones that as Protestants they didn't feel welcome anymore.

There is a photograph of my Dad sitting at a Derry City v Linfield game during a riot and beside him is his Catholic friend from the Brandywell. Years later I was to work with that man's son.

My Dad stopped staying in the city side when he was told to leave the Bogside Inn. The barman presented him with a double whiskey and told him 'I'm sorry Billy, you're not welcome anymore'. When he returned home and retold the story he added 'I am sure there's some poor Catholic man who was in a Protestant bar who has experienced the same'. That type of reaction, that understanding of a plague on many houses was typical of how many people responded to the conflict.

We are unfortunately forgetting people who strove to try and maintain relationships during the worst of times and those who directed their children away from sectarianism. My father and mother worked all over Northern Ireland and treated everyone the same. There are no murals for people like them or epitaphs. People like that are being written out of the narrative. That to me is a shame.

In one of my last meetings with Derek Moore I asked him why he had turned up to discuss rights and liberties. He replied 'manners. I want to treat and be treated with manners'. In many ways Derek spoke to why we have not evolved into a post-conflict society. It is the failure to have created much greater etiquette, protocol and decorum.

There are several reasons for that which include

- Societal trauma;
- Political tactics that have little to do with achieving reconciliation;
- Disagreement over what reconciliation is;
- Sectarianism
- The myth of self and dismissal of the other
- Continually promoting a destabilising past above any sense of a shared future
- Courage and the lack of it
- The disconnection between voters and non-voters and the latter's voicelessness;

So how do we achieve manners as requested and desired by Derek Moore? Here are some ideas.

- 1) **Remembering:** If you lose memory you lose everything. In this place we are wrestling with the past. We must begin to build. Not on new land but upon and within the ruins. There is no escaping the past. It cannot be parked, isolated or abandoned. But if we work on those ruins and see them as sites of harming and being harmed and in so doing accept that the process is one of recovery then we have an opportunity to shape future generations and not return to our repetitive and selective readings of the past. Harm does not have categories. It is neither green or orange. The tears on the cityside and the grief on the Waterside were common experience.
- 2) As Edgar Allan Poe summed we 'at time, find ourselves upon the brink of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember.'" The politicisation of suffering and its attendant rage cannot provide what we need. It is only in grounding the common emotional experience of harm and that we, all of us, will provide the space required to share experience. If we remain in this politicisation of the past we not only re-traumatise those who suffered, we remained fixated upon categorising the dead in the way that violence did. We are a traumatised society and we need the cure and sensitivity of empathy.
- 3) **Trauma:** In her book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* Judith Lewis Herman argues that when we deny a violent that does not suit or agenda but promote those that do that we are involved in the reproduction of a psychological trauma. The conflict was not only a political or cultural episode it was a fundamentally major human event of major magnitude and with greater repercussions. The trauma that many feel and bear will not be cured by courts, inquiries and political wrath. Trauma holds people captive. It must be

recognised as such. We can only address trauma when we realise that it lies at the core of peoples lives. Like harm it is neither green or orange. It is fixed, rooted and at times hidden. Its impacts limit our capacity to move on. It can be treated by a society that shows a conviction to create a common vocabulary of being traumatised.

- 4) We reproduce trauma if we have a politics that George Orwell called double think. The act of simultaneously accepting two mutually contradictory beliefs as correct. We cannot solve trauma if on the one hand we point at the violence against us but stay silent when considering the violence against them. We cannot solve trauma and hurt if we make demands that are selective. If we care about those who have been traumatised, then we need to think hard about what a truly supportive environment would look like. If you actually care about history pause and consider this question. What will future generations think of a society that, when it got peace, poked at the wounds for decades?
- 5) **Reconciliation:** Some of our beliefs are contradictory to reconciliation. Reconciliation is not about subverting people to your principles it is about adapting your principles for reconciliation. Parity of esteem must be real. It must be a conviction. Reconciliation is not management of a problem it is a realisation that we are part of the problem. Undermining reconciliation through ideological adventurism or remaining silent and playing no part in building mutual respect are two sides of the same coin. Reconciliation must be rooted in inter-community restoration. It must be the achievement of human interdependence. Denying reconciliation is an acceptance of not being able to deal with its consequences. Those consequences are essentially challenging the self to change. We not only need a vocabulary of reconciliation but for it to be the stage upon which we all walk as equals.
- 6) **Equals:** To desire to be equal with the 'other' side is a lack of ambition. We should be aiming for an equality based upon partnership. The idea that you should have the same rights as 'them' lacks motivation. That is not equality but equivalence. It places cultural and political demand before what should be universal rights. The right to marry, the right to learn, the right to control your body, the right to work, the right to freedom of speech, the right to cultural expression, the right to not be left in poverty, the right to health, the right to assemble, the right to have your identity recognised should be universal and not sectionalised. Rights are not concessions they are decency, ethics and responsibility.
- 7) **Do we believe in the principle of consent?** If we do we then accept the legitimacy of all constitutional desires. I fear our politicians have done very little to persuade many to shift their position. Republicans have undertaken difficult conversations

and met with unionists to present their case. Party political unionism should do the same. The future of Northern Ireland must be debated. Not along the traditional lines but through evidence-based arguments. Unionists will not protect Northern Ireland unless they develop a civic approach. Republicans will not persuade for a united Ireland unless they accept they have been an impediment to it. The vocabularies of both are too entrenched, too certain of their own arguments. There is nothing fresh in their constitutional thinking. The first to realise that there is no ideal of Britishness or Irishness will have the emotional upper hand. Republicanism and unionism like all nationalism are essentially conservative and constraining.

- 8) **Other:** As someone from a unionist background I am saddened that there remain comments and readings of that community as backward and inept. I am fed up hearing of a broken culture and being told of unionist alienation. The idea that people from unionist backgrounds do not make a major cultural contribution through novels, poetry, art, popular culture and intellectual inquiry is a nonsense.

There is no such thing as unionism. There are unionisms. As someone who wants to share this place I do not see republicans as a group that lacks diversity of opinion and approach. Both unionism and republicanism are fractured. There is educational disadvantage and poverty and social exclusion, that is deepening, in all our communities. There is fear and prejudice but there are also those, many of whom are in this room, who work for tolerance and respect. When I look at the LGBT community, activists for women's rights, activists for environmental protection, people running restorative justice schemes, people who run foodbanks, people helping refugees, people seeking a living wage I see people of all shades. I see Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter arm in arm. But I must look hard to find that. It is not because it does not exist but because sections of the media and the sectarian entrepreneurs do not want recognition of that.

If we are to build a future that is worth having then it must be beyond our own prejudice and conditioning. We must think of the future as an opportunity and not as something that must refer to the past for approval.

That does not mean we are not robust in challenging our real foes – hypocrisy, doublethink or the desire to distort a shared future. As I said people in this room do that and will continue to do so.

The Derry born writer Joyce Cary through his novels constantly challenged the certainty of authority, faith and ideological commitment. He viewed these as concepts that had been converted to labels. Labels he argued were perpetually '...hiding from us all the nature of the real'. The real is for all of us. It has yet to emerge as what defines us...honesty, integrity

and the wonder of being self-effacing. Each is achievable. If we do not seek the real, the opportunity and its potential to create living together **others** will continue to shape our lives in the same pernicious and destabilising way that they have always done.

We can only achieve partnership if we reach into and deliver the manners that Derek Moore and I feel sure many others expects and deserve.