

Proverbial Expressions, the Local Press and the Current “Troubles” in Northern Ireland

Fionnuala Carson Williams

In 1989, twenty years after what came to be generally termed the “Troubles” in Northern Ireland began, a special train left Belfast for the short but significant 100 mile journey to Dublin. The journey was organised by a diverse group of people, with a solid base of trade unionists among them, who wished to draw attention to their objection to the constant violent disruption on the line indiscriminately jeopardising civilian workers and passengers. This rail line is the only one which crosses the border (established in 1925) between Northern Ireland, which remains part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland. Almost since 1969, when protracted violence began, the line has been a target for attack by, ironically, the IRA – Irish Republican Army – paramilitaries who aspire to a united Ireland. The attacks come mainly in the form of bomb scares, but there have also been actual bombs either on the line or, less frequently, on the train itself, causing fatality and injury. Ideologically there does not appear to be any coherence in severing a link between the two places, rather, the reason for the constant onslaught seems to be because the train is a “soft target” – easy to attack and causing great disruption. Even a bomb scare can tie up many troops for several hours and often days. Seven times the Peace Train Organisation, as the group called itself, ran a special Peace Train to demonstrate opposition to violence. After a short stop in Dublin the first one travelled back to Belfast with representatives from the Republic, many of whom had never been to Northern Ireland, or had not been for twenty years since the outbreak of the “Troubles”. On its journey back to Dublin it was stopped mid-way by a bomb scare which, in fact, gained it increased media coverage as most passengers elected to remain overnight on the train, hot food



and drinks being supplied by local support. Following ceasefires in 1994¹ and a marked decrease in the number of alerts the Peace Train Committee symbolically drew their peaceful demonstration to an end with a final Peace Train in October, 1995. However, subsequently, the train has increasingly been used in metaphor, probably initially, in relation to Northern Ireland, in a speech by the British prime minister Tony Blair, after being newly elected in May, 1997, although a similar metaphor had earlier been used in connection with the civil rights movement in the United States.² His phrase, which was duly reported in the media, is now widely heard. Frequency increased in the lead up to the political agreement in 1998. Sam McAughtry, writer, broadcaster and chairperson of the Peace Train Committee, in a recent article on the history of the Train, describes what was probably the expression's first public use with regard to Northern Ireland: "Until Tony Blair won his stunning victory in Britain, [becoming prime minister] I had thought that the Peace Train

¹) The IRA announced that "a complete cessation of military operations," widely referred to as a "ceasefire", would commence at midnight on 31st August, 1994. The Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) made a similar announcement in October of the same year

²) I am very grateful to Wolfgang Mieder, Department of German and Russian, University of Vermont, for pointing this out and for sending on various Internet references to "peace train". While the metaphor had been used in connection with the American Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and 60s the earliest specific example found so far is a song, released in October, 1971, composed and sung by Cat Stevens, born Steven Georgiou in 1948 in London, who converted to Islam and has been known since 1979 as Yusuf Islam. His song was titled 'Peace Train' and was an international hit. In the 1980s, when reissued on compact discs, the song experienced renewed interest. About 1987 the same song again enjoyed popularity when released by rock group – 10,000 Maniacs – however, two years later, when Yusuf Islam reportedly declared his support for Ayatollah Khomeini's condemnation of Salman Rushdie, the group stopped singing the song and asked that that track be removed from album pressings. All this would have been publicised in the media and given further airings to "peace train".

The phrase "peace train" was also used, in North American newspapers at least, throughout the 80s to describe other events around the world, for example, in a headline in *The Christian Science Monitor* 6/7/83 p. 3, *Independent French fail to hop on Europe's peace train* (story about lack of antinuclear protest in France) and in the *Chicago Tribune* 21/4/89 Friday section p. 24, in a piece by Neal Justin on a film festival: "The film world is opening up to glasnost. Facets Multimedia will join the peace train next week with a presentation of more than 30 recent documentaries filmed in the Soviet Union."

was truly a thing of the past but [he] gave us symbolic recognition, when he drew on our brain-child³ in his plea to Sinn Féin and the IRA to come out of the shadows and join the democratic parties around the table: “If you don’t”, he warned, “the peace train will move on without you”. McAughtry, himself, concludes the same article: “I hope that when Mr. Blair’s peace train pulls out of the station, all of our people will be represented on it. That was the intention of our organisation all along. It is a matter for pride that we gave Prime Minister Blair and President Clinton such a powerful metaphor for peace in our time” (McAughtry 1997). Since the prime minister’s use of the phrase in June, 1997, and intensifying in the fortnight or so before the Agreement in April, 1998, the metaphor has been frequently used by politicians when speaking on the importance of reaching an agreement. The Agreement itself, a paper drawn up over two weary years, was intended to form a basis on which all participating parties could move forward but was subject to many last minute alterations. A deadline of midnight on a Thursday had been set but this came and went and it was actually Friday before it was finally accepted by most participants in its drafting. As this was the Friday before Easter the Agreement, the official title of which is actually “The Belfast Agreement” in line with naming agreements after the place in which they are signed, for example, the Sunningdale Agreement of 1974, has become known orally and in the media⁴, as the “Good Friday Agreement” a name which imbues it with hope for the future, and bestows on it a certain aura. The religious reference may be taken to its deepest level of meaning of salvation through sacrifice.

Getting back to the reason for reaching an agreement, that is, the political instability which resulted in violent conflict which had been going on in Northern Ireland, with its repercussions elsewhere, for thirty years, the name which has come to be generally accepted for it is “The Troubles”. A title which, in fact, harks back to an earlier phase in Irish history when the whole island was part of the United Kingdom and attempts were being

³) While the idea of a train journey for peace was new to Ireland similar demonstrations had previously been run elsewhere, for example, in South Africa.

⁴) BBC Radio Ulster morning news programme 17/6/98. Radio Ulster is broadcast from Belfast. Ulster is the province in which Northern Ireland lies.

made for independence. This was in the early 1920s and resulted in the partition of Ireland in 1921 into the larger part with twenty-six counties which eventually became the Republic and a much smaller area of six counties in the northern part of the island which retained British links.

This short article is part of a wider brief commissioned by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, a government funded body, to collect the folklore of the “Troubles”⁵ a topic which, for some reason, has been little investigated but which I am finding not only professionally but also personally satisfying and worthwhile. It seems that the term the “Troubles” came to be used early on in the period. At first most open violence, certainly bombing, often with no or inadequate warning, took place in the main city Belfast, the commercial heart of Northern Ireland and seat of government until 1972⁶. In terms of size it is really Northern Ireland’s only city, having a population of about half a million which is approximately a third of the whole population of Northern Ireland. A contributor (as I have decided to call my informants – a term too easily misconstrued as “informer” in a situation with undercover agents working for and against government) one contributor from a rural area when questioned about the emergence of the term “the Troubles” describes how people living outside Belfast would hear about a bomb there and say “Did you hear about the trouble in Belfast?” which, he surmised, rapidly and easily translated into “troubles”⁷. It is interesting that when interviewing elderly contributors in the Republic of Ireland they automatically assume that it is the 1920s “Troubles” that are in question, whereas there is no misunderstanding in Northern Ireland. Of course, while this term is understood by all and certainly used not only orally, but also in all the media, it would not be used by paramilitaries and their sup-

⁵ I gratefully acknowledge being awarded the John Campbell Cultural Traditions Fellowship of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council to begin this collection. The fellowship commenced in October 1997 and was of eight months, spread over eighteen months.

⁶ In 1972 Stormont, the Northern Ireland parliament, was suspended and the area ruled directly from Westminster, London.

⁷ Contributor in his early 50s born and reared in County Tyrone, John Campbell Cultural Traditions Fellowship Collection Tape 1 recorded 3/1/98. It is intended to house the Collection in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Cultra, Holywood, County Down.

porters either orally or in their publications. Instead the terms “the armed struggle”, “the conflict” and “the war” are used, for example, this quote from Gerry Adams, leader of the republican Sinn Féin party, about decommissioning arms where, rather than gloss over the term, it is repeated and repeated: ...*there is not even a possibility of addressing the **conflict**, the causes of the **conflict** or the symptoms of the **conflict***⁸. Ironically, now that most paramilitary groupings have declared ceasefires, the past violence is in a novel way being openly referred to in official circles as a “war” while the use of the term “conflict” is even more widespread⁹. This is but one example of terms which are or were not accepted across the board and, in fact, could be overt indications of political leaning. Different groups have different terminology, not only for the whole situation, but also for themselves, other groups, the British Army and the official security forces, prisons and all the paraphernalia of war – weapons, road blocks, and so on.

How does the media deal with the varying terminology? Obviously it depends what section one is considering; while broadcasting is largely confined to only two companies, operating to broadly the same standards, this does not apply to the press. I have chosen to focus on phrases in the most widely read newspaper – the *Belfast Telegraph*. It is widely read, according to scientific survey (Survey 1996), in the sense of being read all over Northern Ireland in both urban and rural districts and in the sense of its readership covering all socio-economic groups and with a wide range of political views. It is also read abroad, mainly by emigrants in North America, but also in Australia and New

⁸) *Belfast Telegraph* 14/7/97 second “News” page, p. 4, in a piece by Martina Purdy and Dan McGinn [reporters] titled *Arms issue must be removed: Adams*. Henceforth in such page references the newspaper will simply be referred to as *BT*. If the reporter’s job, for example, “Political Correspondent” is specified with his or her particular piece in the newspaper then this will be included, otherwise simply “[reporter]” or “[columnist]”, as appropriate, will be added.

⁹) The IRA ceasefire of 1994 ended in February, 1996. A “restoration of the ceasefire” (widely called “the second ceasefire”) was declared in July, 1997: IRA statement as quoted on the front page of the *Belfast Telegraph* 19/7/97. Despite many subsequent murders and other violent acts both the IRA and CLMC maintain that cessations obtain. I would like to thank Gordon Gillespie, political researcher, for help in clarifying chronology.

Zealand, and parts are available on the world wide web¹⁰. The paper has been produced in Belfast since 1870 and would now pride itself on appealing to all. While there is a choice of morning papers reflecting different political stances the *Belfast Telegraph* is, in fact, the only locally-produced evening paper. All this obviously affects the phrases it uses which must not only be *understood* by its readers but also be acceptable to them. As regards being comprehensible it is interesting to note that many of the books which are a product of the “Troubles,” whether intended for general or specialised readership, often include a glossary, indeed, a study of such specialised glossaries would be rewarding and they do form part of the collection which I am making¹¹. Writers are often not from Northern Ireland and have obviously had to learn the new vocabulary and are aware that the wider readership which they hope to reach outside Northern Ireland will need some explanation, however, newspapers, and films and plays, survive without glossaries and I suspect that the glossary has become part of the book genre itself.

An additional reason for choosing the *Belfast Telegraph* was that its contributors as well as its readers represent a politically broad sweep of the community. The phrases would therefore be much less likely to be transitory and ephemeral than the set of phrases of a small, limited group (of any kind, extreme or otherwise), and would probably endure. The newspaper contains material from a variety of people: as well as comments from the editor and columnists there is also reported dialogue and interviews with a miscellany of people. The letters from readers to the editor provide a further set of contributors.

With this one newspaper it is possible to detect the phrases which are being used by a range of people. The bigger the range of users the more likely they are to last. As regards dialogue this particular newspaper seems to accurately record what has

¹⁰) <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk>

¹¹) An example of non-fiction for general readership with a glossary is Sally Belfrage's *The Crack A Belfast Year*, Glossary viii-x (Belfrage 1987). This is a United States writer's descriptions and conversations with people involved in various ways with the conflict. The book's title *The Crack* is probably abbreviated from the common expression “What's the crack?” meaning “What is happening?”, “What is going on?”

A little of the terminology of the Northern Ireland conflict is included in Bernard Share's *Slangue* (Share 1997).

been said; other media such as radio and television verify what is in print. Within the newspaper it is possible to distinguish those phrases which enjoy a more oral than literary currency. A chief value of the newspaper in relation to phraseology is that for those phrases which it does adopt it provides context.

While there must obviously be a policy on how events are described it seems that the guidelines are unwritten and the only editorial comment¹² I have had regarding policy is that the city in the north-west of Northern Ireland is referred to as “Londonderry” (the unionist option) in preference to “Derry” (the nationalist option).¹³ The only other inkling of editorial policy which I have so far been able to gain is that the vicious attacks by paramilitaries on singled out individuals referred to orally, and formerly in print, as “paramilitary punishments” are now described as “punishment beatings”¹⁴ (there was also an intermediate period when such thuggery was described in the media as “*so-called* paramilitary punishment”[my italics]).¹⁵

Different parts of the paper display different styles and employ differing terminology, for example, the death notices, which, of course, record the deaths of those caught up in the violence alongside other deaths, have a distinctive terminology. Both it and the pseudonyms used by letter writers, however, often relate to the set phrases. It is unlikely that the editor exercises a veto on the pseudonyms of the letter writers or on the content of death notices.

While the editorial policy of the *Belfast Telegraph* is still being pursued a recent comment by the editor of another newspaper, this time a weekly, in a radio interview is of interest. He

¹³) Query from me in a phone call to the editorial office of the *Belfast Telegraph* answered by a young-sounding, possibly American, female June, 1998. A letter to the Editor, Ed Curran, enquiring about the newspaper policy with a copy of this article was sent in August, 1999.

¹³) With regard to the city name this has become such a political hot potato that a local light entertainment radio presenter on both BBC Radio Foyle (based in Derry) and BBC Radio Ulster has jokingly coined “Derry, stroke [/] Londonderry”, or simply “Stroke [/] City” for it and this now has a wide currency in certain contexts. Officially the city’s name is “Derry” while the county is “Londonderry”.

¹⁴) Information from same person during same call as mentioned at note 12.

¹⁵) Personal observation.

said: *A newspaper tries to walk the tightrope for both sides*¹⁶. His newspaper is published in a town – Portadown, County Down – which has suffered immensely.

In preparation for the paper delivered to the International Society for Folk Narrative Congress it was decided to take the *Belfast Telegraph* for one month and analyse the phrases contained; the phrases were located manually rather than electronically¹⁷. The month of July, 1997, was chosen as July is a month containing significant historical events which are commemorated annually, but which have caused much controversy in recent years. It also so happened that in July last year important political decisions were being made.

In this article phrases about the situation in Northern Ireland have come from several distinct parts of the newspaper – the front page, the editorial and readers’ letters, the news pages, interviews and articles by regular columnists. Frequently the paper reinforces phrases internally by using them on the front page and then again inside in a fuller piece on the same subject. These are in turn often taken up by readers and reused in letters to the editor.

The criterion for the phrases which are examined here is that they have been plucked from dialogue and transposed into print. This has proved relatively easy to distinguish as much of the content about the conflict is constituted from reported speech and interviews. A good deal of the dialogue is quite specialised as it comes from the lips of politicians and representatives of various kinds and some is even drawn from formal speeches and statements. In the newspaper particular phrases are highlighted, for instance, headings, and, in the case of the *Belfast Telegraph* at least, the editorial frequently fastens on key phrases.

As regards referents, phrases about the situation in Northern Ireland fall into four main categories – that based on war-

¹⁶) BBC Radio Ulster 28/7/98 “Sunday Sequence,” a regular, morning religious affairs programme.

¹⁷) The electronic version of the paper was much shorter than the printed one and excluded certain sections. I was interested in looking at the paper as a whole and, as there can be several editions, in examining the same edition – the Late edition – for each day; this is the most widely read edition which people buy on their way home from work and the one that is delivered to houses. In July there were 27 newspapers with an approximate average of 28 pages each.

fare itself, for example, in describing the new, fresh from Great Britain, Minister of Security and Economy's job: ***tiptoeing through the minefield that is Northern Ireland***¹⁸, ***London and Dublin want the Drumcree crisis defused***¹⁹ and ***Orangemen are engaged in a fierce battle on two fronts – political and spiritual – a Twelfth demonstration heard today***²⁰. Orangemen are members of a brotherhood called the Orange Order who annually commemorate the victory of the Protestant Prince William of Orange over the Roman Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. A "Twelfth demonstration" would be one on the 12th July, held to be the date of the battle, would and include a gathering in a field of members of branches (or lodges) from different places and their families to hear speeches from officers of the order. Besides demonstrations on the 12th July there are public processions of Orangemen both before and after. The "Drumcree crisis" refers to a procession held the Sunday before the Twelfth where, after attending a service in the episcopalian Drumcree Church of Ireland, of the Anglian Community of Churches, on the outskirts of Portadown, Orangemen parade into the town. Their route takes them along the Garvaghy Road where they are not welcome and, in the past few years, this has led to intense violence. In the phrases not only the minefields and defusing of contemporary war but also ancient battles are evoked by reference to segregated education as ***an Achilles' heel***²¹ and a march which incited violence as ***a***

¹⁸) *BT* 2/7/97 ninth "News" page, p. 15, in an interview by Paul Connolly, Security Correspondent, with the new minister Connolly writes: "And security in itself is the toughest job around, tiptoeing through the minefield that is Northern Ireland."

¹⁹) *BT* 3/7/97 p. 16, Editorial titled "Images of Drumcree".

²⁰) *BT* 12/7/97 p. 14, page titled "The Twelfth" devoted to reports of speeches made at Twelfth demonstrations in a piece titled *Order "battling on two fronts"* quoting from a speech at Tobermore, Co. Londonderry, to members of the order by Brother Alfred Lee, Londonderry County Grand Master. County Grand Master is an Orange Order title and there are twelve grand masters in all (ten for counties and two each for the cities of Belfast and Derry). County Grand Master is just one grade below the highest rank "Grand Master".

²¹) *BT* 9/7/97 "Opinion" page, p. 12, in an article by Eric Waugh [regular columnist] titled *The mix and match approach to peace*: "This [segregated education] is the fatal Achilles heel which continues to cripple the process of growing together in Northern Ireland. Youngsters who go to school together are friends for life."

Pyrrhic victory²². *Drawing a line in the sand*, most famously associated with the 19th century Battle of the Alamo in Texas has also been recalled²³. Some in Northern Ireland – those who feel that they have been abandoned to fend for themselves in a hostile environment – are described as having ***a siege mentality*** and phrases such as: *Orangemen have been under siege*²⁴ are common. The relevance of siege references is obvious to most people in Northern Ireland because of the Siege of Derry (the place mentioned earlier) prior to the decisive Battle of the Boyne in 1690 where apprentice boys closed the city gates and held out until reinforcements arrived from England. The siege gave Derry its *blason populaire* the ***Maiden City***²⁵ and also the skeleton in its coat of arms. In July, 1997, when, after many tense days, the Orangemen altered their plans and decided not to try to parade along certain controversial routes the *Belfast Telegraph* banner heading was ***The Relief of Ulster***²⁶, a variation on the common phrase ***the relief of Mafeking***²⁷, in contrast often used ironically when help comes for a *minor* crisis. It, of course, refers to a siege during the Boer War and many would, as well as to Derry, see comparisons between Mafeking and Northern Ireland itself.

²²) BT 11/7/97 second “News” page, p. 4, in a piece by Martina Purdy [reporter] titled *How history may judge the Order’s momentous decision* [not to march along a contentious route]: “There are sharp divisions between those [in the Orange Order] who felt the only way forward was to continue to assert the right to march, and those who argue re-routing was the “least worse option”. The latter saw Garvaghy Road [where a recent Orange march was accompanied by massive violence] as a Pyrrhic victory which threatens all that Orangemen hold dear, including the state itself.” [in the text above I have capitalised ‘pyrrhic’]

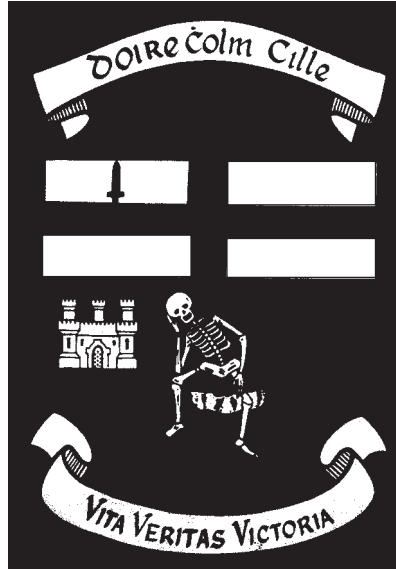
²³) BT 10/7/97 p. 12, Editorial: “Ground has been given, but now decisions have been taken to draw lines on the sand, beyond which the Orangemen will not be pushed”. The Orange Order had agreed to a certain curtailment of its activities

²⁴) BT 12/7/97 p. 14, page titled “The Twelfth” quote from Londonderry County Grand Master – see note 20.

²⁵) BT 10/7/97 seventh “News” page, p. 11, in a piece by Jason Johnson [reporter] titled *Tourist blackspot* about tourists cancelling visits to Northern Ireland because of the “unrest”: “And now it transpires that a Londonderry-based tour operator has begun taking his clients – mostly from the USA and Britain – into Donegal [the neighbouring county in the Republic of Ireland] instead of around the Maiden City.”

²⁶) BT 11/7/97 front page, title of lead story.

²⁷) For additional usages of this phrase see Partridge 1997: 143.



The Derry coat of arms.

A second category of phrases describes the situation in medical terms, for example:

Contrary to what some politicians keep saying Orange marches have always presented a **headache** for the authorities²⁸, the **cancer** of sectarianism²⁹ and If a ceasefire is to last, there can be no talk of Sinn Fein “**in quarantine**”³⁰.

²⁸) *BT* 1/7/97 p. 10, reader’s letter signed “Non-Orange Protestant”, Belfast 9: “Contrary to what some politicians keep saying, Orange marches have always presented a headache for the authorities, to such an extent that they were banned for more than thirty years last century.”

²⁹) *BT* 11/7/97 third “News” page, p. 6: “We renew our offer to the Ballynafeigh Lodge to begin discussions immediately aimed at removing the cancer of sectarianism from the parades issue” – quote from Gerard Rice, spokesperson of the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community Group. The Orange Order is divided into local branches or lodges. Ballynafeigh Lodge is the one closest to the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community Group

³⁰) *BT* 19/7/97 first “News” page, p. 3, drop quote in a piece by Martina Purdy, Political Correspondent, on the recently announced IRA ceasefire. ‘Fein,’ from the Irish ‘féin,’ is often written without an accent in English-language texts

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'Courageous' Orange decision praised | **Mowlam calls for IRA ceasefire** | **'Orangemen's rights should be respected'**

THE RELIEF OF ULSTER

Drop protests after parades switch: Order

THE Orange Order today demanded that all nationalist residents "withdraw peacefully" from areas after Orangemen dramatically changed their parade routes.

The message from general Grand Master Jeffrey Donohoe to parading groups was: "What is requested, is a withdrawal from the area." He said that the Orange Order would be prepared to accept a withdrawal from the area if it was done peacefully.

The message was sent to parading groups in the Belfast area and to the Grand Master of the Orange Order in London.

The message was also sent to the Grand Master of the Orange Order in London.

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By Our Political Staff

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DUP and Orange hardliners attack 'no walk' decision

By Chris Thornton

THE DUP and Orange Order hardliners today attacked the decision to withdraw from nationalist areas after the Orange Order's decision to change its parade routes.

The DUP's Ian Paisley said that the Orange Order's decision was a "sell-out" and that it was a "betrayal" of the Orange Order's principles.

The Orange Order's Grand Master Jeffrey Donohoe said that the decision was a "necessary" one and that it was a "peaceful" one.

'Orange gesture gives community a breathing space': Comment, page 10

PEACE Petition

Signature petitions are a symptom of deep-rooted tribalism which have caused both sides of this community Christian community for generations. Our Protestant & Catholic traditions often involve selfish & controlling attitudes. This is evil. Your answer is kindness, openness & forgiveness.

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- 1 You are deeply sorry for the sins of this nation, and ask God for mercy and forgiveness.
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- 3 You desire to break with tradition, and instead to 'love your neighbour as yourself'.

'How good and powerful is it to witness together - from suffering as unity... For those the Lord desires His blessing' Psalm 133

Molyneux plays down his role

Lord Molyneux today played down his role in the Orange Order's decision to change its parade routes.

He said that he was not involved in the decision and that he was not responsible for the decision.

He said that he was not involved in the decision and that he was not responsible for the decision.

Belfast Telegraph

Jeffrey Donohoe, Assistant Grand Master of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, pictured this morning.

Photo by Martin Douglas

BAUME & MERCIER GENEVE

Automatic watch, stainless steel case, leather strap, 18k gold case, 18k gold case, 18k gold case.

Belfast Telegraph

Jeffrey Donohoe, Assistant Grand Master of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, pictured this morning.

Photo by Martin Douglas

Orange Lodges' full statements	A step back from crisis	How history will judge the Order	Politicians praise decision
PAGE 3	PAGE 4	PAGE 5	PAGE 5

Weather Outlook

CONSUMER INTEREST INDEX

CONSUMER INTEREST INDEX: A survey this morning with some 1,000 consumers has shown a steady rise in the index of consumer confidence. The index rose to 85.5 in July from 84.5 in June. The index is a key indicator of the health of the economy. For more details see page 10.

Front page of "Belfast Telegraph". 11.7.97

A third set of allusions is to sports and pastimes as in the following: *At Westminster last night, the Secretary of State told the republican movement that **the ball is in their court** [as regards joining the peace talks]³¹, Sinn Féin talks about **creating a level playing field** but with the IRA's weaponry still intact outside the talks chamber that will be far from the case³² and **to make up the ground already lost in the moral stakes**³³. As well as allusions to field and team sports there are also references to board games and indoor sports and pastimes as in the following: ...*politics in Northern Ireland should be like a game of chess, not a boxing match*³⁴ and *The final piece in the jigsaw seemed to be the Anglo-Irish meeting in London – when the two governments refused to yield to unionist pressure to toughen the stance on weapons*³⁵. There are, in addition, general references to pastimes like: *the gameplan*³⁶, *the main play-**

³¹) *BT* 1/7/97 second 'News' page, p. 10, Editorial titled *Time to decide* which exhorts representatives of the political party Sinn Féin to join the other parties in the peace talks and for the IRA to declare a ceasefire. The metaphor is derived from Dr Mowlam's speech in parliament the night before [see *BT* same date and page, in a piece by Mark Simpson, Political Correspondent: "Dr Mowlam said a political settlement was "an urgent necessity," but stressed that "the ball is in their (Sinn Féin's) court." " Dr Marjorie Mowlam is Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (the secretary of state is the government minister responsible for Northern Ireland).]

Advertisements for the *Belfast Telegraph* of this date outside newsagents carried this phrase.

³²) *BT* 18/7/97 p. 12, Editorial titled *Holding on to the guns*.

³³) *BT* 1/7/97 p. 10, signed female reader's letter from Belfast 9 about the difficulty not appearing as "bullies" parading Orangemen face where routes are heavily policed

³⁴) *BT* 21/7/97 p. 10, signed male reader's letter from Lisburn, County Down; "Politics should be like a game of chess" was also used for the letter's title.

³⁵) *BT* 19/7/97 first "News" page, p. 3, in same piece as described in note 33. While the Editorial frequently fastens on key phrases used elsewhere in the newspaper this particular phrase may have travelled the other way and been prompted by the opening words of the previous day's editorial *BT* 18/7/97 p. 12: "The publication of the text of a letter from the Government to Sinn Féin adds another piece to the decommissioning jigsaw..."

³⁶) *BT* 12/7/97 p. 12, reader's letter from Ivan Foster, a minister of the Free Presbyterian Church (set up in the 1950s in Northern Ireland by Ian Paisley, also founder and leader of the loyalist [extreme unionist] Democratic Unionist Party): "If Drumcree parades were cancelled forever, we all know that the focus would switch to another parade. The gameplan would move on until there was not one activity remaining that reminded Roman Catholic Ireland that there had been such a thing as the Protestant Reformation."

ers in the game and *everything to play for*³⁷ which do not mention specific sports.

Obviously the situation in Northern Ireland and the manner in which it is reported is operating against a broader background and it is occasionally possible to make connections between what is happening in the wider world and its impact on the phrases. The minefield remark, for instance, came at a time when there was much publicity for an anti-landmine campaign. An optimistic reaction by the then Lord Mayor of Belfast, Alban Maginness, in regard to the IRA announcement about restoring the ceasefire and the possibility of the peace that would follow, refers to the new (it was introduced in 1995), highly publicised British lottery: *It's like winning the jackpot and the lottery twice in one week*³⁸. *The ball being in their court* references in relation to the "Troubles" emerged during the very popular Wimbledon tennis championships which are televised live in full. Since these are an annual July event, coinciding with what has been the most difficult month in the Northern Ireland calendar for several consecutive years, it is likely that such phrases will remain connected with the "Troubles".

The final set of references, and the one with which I commenced, concerns journeys, often the imaginary journey towards peace, and this is the type on which I would now like to focus. The journey references themselves fall into two categories – those surrounding the processions of members of the Orange Order brotherhood and those the inspiration for which was the peace train. I will begin with the former. The processions or marches of the Orange Order take place between May and September, which period has for some time has been known as *the marching season*³⁹. The chief march is on 12th July which marks the date of the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, Orangemen identifying with the winning side. The marches consist of members wearing regalia and accompanied by a band or band. They are usually

³⁷) BT 4/7/97 p. 14, Editorial about parade at Drumcree

³⁸) BT 19/7/97 second "News" page, p. 4, under general heading *IRA Ceasefire* in a piece titled *Parties' Mixed Reaction*.

³⁹) BT 2/7/97 first "News" page, p. 3, in a piece by Mark Simpson, Political Correspondent, on US investment in Northern Ireland, opening line: "A leading American financier warned today that US dollars were hanging on a peaceful outcome to the marching season."

in towns in areas where they have support but with changes in demography this has sometimes altered, leading to confrontation in a few places with those who oppose their views.

The controversy surrounding Orange parades has given rise to a set of phrases alluding to journeys on foot, for example: *the Orangemen's action* [not to march along certain controversial routes] was **a major step forward** in the political development of Northern Ireland⁴⁰ and we have other examples such as: **some irrevocable steps towards peace would help enormously**⁴¹ and the following: *Progress, if it is to be made, will only be obtained by mainstream politicians, both unionist and nationalist, taking short steps together, as they do in the local government sphere. For the moment, giant leaps of accommodation – towards a Northern Ireland Administration, are unachievable*⁴². Often the peace initiatives, when being described as footsteps, are likened to an infant learning to walk and these steps, illustrating the Law of the Weight of the Bow, while significant, are unsteady, as in: **a first step**⁴³ and **the first faltering steps**⁴⁴. Leading churchmen are also using such terminology, possibly with overtones of pilgrimage; the primate of the Church of Ireland, Archbishop Robin Eames, has exhorted: *Let us move forward together on the long haul to resolving the problems of which the parades issue is merely a part*⁴⁵ while Bishop Patrick Walsh of the Roman

⁴⁰) BT 8/7/97 second "News" page, p. 4, in a piece by Dan McGinn [reporter] titled *Bruton warns "patronising" nationalists*, remark by John Bruton, former taoiseach or prime minister of the Republic of Ireland: "Writing in the *Sunday Independent* [a newspaper produced in Dublin], Mr Bruton said the Orangemen's action was a major step forward..."

⁴¹) BT 2/7/97 quote from financier – see note 36 for details

⁴²) BT 8/7/97 p. 10, Editorial

⁴³) BT 12/7/97 p. 12, Editorial, final sentence: "We have a long way to go before live and let live becomes a reality in Northern Ireland, but at least a first step has been taken on the road to mutual understanding." This is a comment on the Orange Order's decision to cancel or reroute contentious parades.

⁴⁴) BT 8/7/97 "Features" page, p. 11, piece by Paul Connolly [reporter] titled *Relating to police and public*, opening sentence: "The first, faltering steps towards enhanced communication between the RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary] and the citizens it polices are being taken, largely unnoticed, in Belfast."

⁴⁵) BT 3/7/97 p. 7, in a piece by Noel McAdam [reporter] titled *Primate in plain talk on parade*; the original report had "are" not "is".

Catholic Church made a plea for *all to walk together*⁴⁶. More overt religious reference has also been noticed, for example, the following: **A huge exodus of people leaving Northern Ireland over the peak of the marching season was reported with airports and ports reporting brisk trade**⁴⁷.

On the other hand, walking has been shown in a negative light as in the phrases: **a backward step**⁴⁸, they [meaning the Orangemen] **just walked all over us**⁴⁹, *Might is not right. They [the Orangemen] have walked over our rights today*⁵⁰ and *The IRA, wrongfooted by the Orange Order move [altered plans], callously tried to stir sectarian tension on the Eleventh night by launching a bomb and gun attack on the security forces in Belfast*⁵¹. For a time the Orange people marching were referred

⁴⁶) BT 11/7/97 third "News" page p. 6, in a piece by Julie O'Connor [reporter] titled *Church leaders praise the Order* which draws together comments by the four main church leaders: "Is this not now the time for all to walk together in what unites us, namely the love of Christ?"; the original report had no question mark.

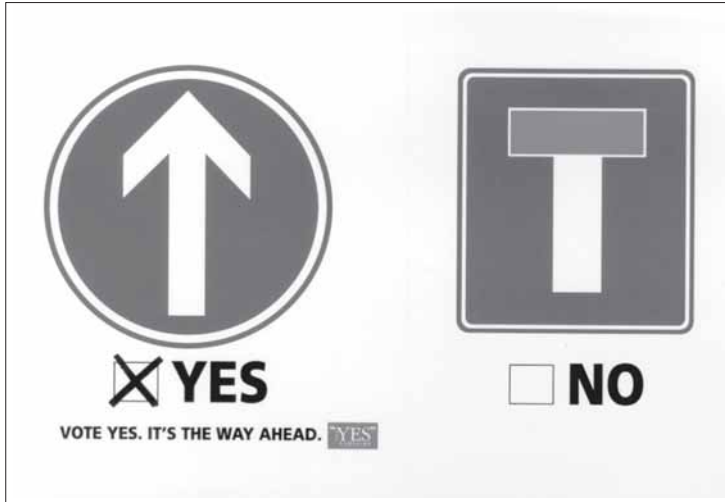
⁴⁷) BT 1/7/97 first "News" page, p. 3, in a piece by Paul Connolly [reporter] on the widespread tension and fear of impending violence.

⁴⁸) BT 7/7/97 "Opinion" page, p. 10, in a piece titled *What the Papers said*, quote from the *Irish Independent*, a daily newspaper produced in Dublin: "...when a march is seen so universally as a backward step, it is hard to carry it off with dignity".

⁴⁹) BT 4/7/97 first *News* page, p. 3, in a piece by Julie O'Connor [reporter] titled *Gloomy mood at road camp*: "a grandmother [named] who has lived on the Garvaghy Road for 24 years, explained: We stood back in 1995 and let them march and just look what happened. The people were shocked at the triumphalism shown and then the medals, that was too much....I guarantee you if that had not happened we would never have been so opposed to these marches. They just walked all over us." In 1995, following the first march delayed by opposition at Garvaghy, Orangemen who had been present could avail of a commemorative medal bearing the words "Siege of Drumcree".

⁵⁰) BT 7/7/97 first "News" page, p. 9, in a piece by Paul Connolly and Claire McGahan [reporters] titled *Garvaghy – the morning after* quote from a Garvaghy woman resident (who asked the reporters not to name her) commenting on the decision to allow the procession of Orangemen along the Garvaghy Road where it was not welcome

⁵¹) BT 14/7/97 p. 10, Editorial. The Eleventh Night, the eve of the Twelfth of July, in accordance with calendar custom in general, is when bonfires in certain places are lit at midnight; it would seem from personal observation that bonfires are becoming increasingly large to the extent that material collected for some (mainly in the form of wooden pallets) extends over whole or considerable areas of public car parks, for example, in 1999 at least, a car park at Hope Street, Great Victoria Street Station and a car park adjacent to Posnett Street, off Botanic Avenue, both in Belfast.



Postcard issued by the Yes-campaign. This was a political group independent of political parties, created to promote voting in favour of the Belfast agreement on the referendum following its signing on May 22. Posters of similar design were displayed also in public areas. They used the blue, white and red of traffic signs. 1998.

to by opponents simply as **Orange feet**. *Under no conditions will the residents of the Ormeau Road accept an Orange foot on the Ormeau Road and Mo Mowlam's game-plan for the Ormeau Road, I am sure, is how to put Orange feet on the Ormeau Road*⁵². Isolating part of the body in this way has a dehumanising effect, the feet becoming not only anonymous but mindless. The Orange processions take place on public roads and a phrase often used to support the right of such parades is that they occur

⁵²) BT 9/7/97 "Features" page, p. 13, in an interview by Mark Simpson [reporter] with Gerard Rice. The expression was also used again in the interview: "It [Dr Mowlam's visit to the area] was all part of how to get Orange feet on the Ormeau Road". "Under no conditions will the residents ...accept an Orange foot on the Ormeau Road" was also quoted in one of the joint lead stories on the front page.



*Black-and-white metal brooch issued
by the Peace Train Committee in 1989.
About 5 cm in diameter.*

on *The Queen's Highway*⁵³, emphasising the support for the monarchy which Orangemen espouse⁵⁴.

Other terminology linked to the journeys or processions are such phrases as: *Trying to solve the political problems of Northern Ireland by violence is a dead end*⁵⁵, *people in high places are hard at work, trying to find exit routes with honour*⁵⁶ and simply *U-turn*, used twice as headings on the same date⁵⁷. These maintain the metaphor of journeying and extend to vehicle journeys as in: *he [Gerard Rice, spokesperson of Lower Ormeau Concerned Community Group] is driving Saturday's protest*

⁵³) BT 11/7/97 "Opinion" page, p. 10, in piece by Kevin Myers [columnist] which originally appeared in the *Irish Times*, a quality daily produced in Dublin. The article is titled *On the precipice, our own footsteps took us to the edge*: "...the Garvaghy Road residents have some right on their side. So too do the Orangemen who wish to remember their war dead by walking along what they regard as The Queen's Highway."

⁵⁴) During subsequent controversy about Orangemen's processions along the Ormeau Road just north of the Ormeau Bridge, where there is a body of opposition to them, feet in orange were painted on the road, presumably as an act of defiance by those in favour of marching by that route and this was reported in the papers.

⁵⁵) BT 3/7/97 second "News" page, p. 4, piece by Marie Foy [reporter] titled *Mitchell upbeat on peace prospects* quote from Senator George Mitchell, chairperson of the peace talks.

⁵⁶) BT 3/7/97 p. 16, Editorial about the Drumcree march controversy.

⁵⁷) BT 11/7/97 second "News" page, p. 4, *Nationalists "on trial" over U-turn* & third "News" page, p. 6: *Dublin calls for a positive response to march U-turn* – both head pieces on the Orange Order's decision to cancel or re-route a number of parades which might have caused disturbances. The newspaper may have a title writer.

*campaign, with his eyes firmly on the road*⁵⁸ and *Loyalists will not become crash-test dummies for decommissioning*⁵⁹. We also find the following: *to kick-start the peace process*⁶⁰ and *what is important is that the peace process itself gets in gear and people see some momentum being reached by that*⁶¹. Allusions to roads have been carried into visual expressions of popular culture as in the posters (and murals) of mock road signs banning Orangemen and in the publicity for the referendum in May which followed the Agreement. These visual expressions then sometimes appear in newspaper photographs; the *Belfast Telegraph* does not, however, have a regular cartoon.

Moving on to the peace train references, Tony Blair's original metaphor was maintained throughout July, for instance: *Dr Mowlam was also working to keep the political talks process on track – even if the train stayed in the station*⁶² and *There was a clear, shared determination [between Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern, taoiseach, or prime minister, of the Republic of Ireland] to try to keep the peace process on track...*⁶³. There are many references to tracks, particularly twin tracks, but it is sometimes difficult to determine whether or not these are, or have any resonance with, train tracks, for example: *Sinn Fein/IRA ... pursued a twin-track approach in the ballot box and the Armalite [a Japanese AR 180 high velocity, collapsible rifle with*

⁵⁸) *BT* 9/7/97 “Features” page, p. 13, [reporter] Mark Simpson's ending to his interview with Gerard Rice.

⁵⁹) *BT* 1/7/97 second “News” page, p. 4, in a piece by Mark Simpson, Political Correspondent, titled *Warning on guns deal*, quotation from an article in US based newspaper *Irish Voice* by Gary McMichael, leader of the loyalist Ulster Democratic Party.

⁶⁰) *BT* 7/7/97 second “News” page, p. 4, in a piece by Chris Thornton, Member of the *Belfast Telegraph* Reporting Team, titled *Garvaghy residents plan more protests* quote from Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition spokesperson Breandán Mac Cionnaith.

⁶¹) *BT* 14/7/97 second “News” page, p. 4, in a piece by Dan McGinn [reporter] titled *Talk to stop street fights over parades urges Mo* quote from Dr Marjorie Mowlam.

⁶²) *BT* 5/7/97 second “News” page, p. 2, by Noel McAdam [reporter]: “As tension over the prospect of Drumcree III [a third successive period of summer violence there] grew, Dr Mowlam was also working to keep the political talks process on track...station.”

⁶³) *BT* 4/7/97 second “News” page, p. 4, in a piece by Desmond McCartan [regular columnist but here acting as a reporter] titled *Differences over Drumcree parade played down*.

a deservedly notorious reputation used by the Provisional Irish Republican Army in the earlier part of the conflict]⁶⁴. While most of the proverbial expressions as they appear in the newspaper seem to be *verbatim* the peace train metaphor is one which has been particularly elaborately developed in print, usually just by extending the metaphor. Elaboration in the newspaper most often occurs in the editorial⁶⁵ and in articles by the regular columnists but can also be found in the letters, one even with the pen-name “Train Driver”⁶⁶.

With a year’s hindsight I was able to select from the newspaper only those proverbial expressions about the conflict which continued to circulate in oral tradition. I have kept the same paper for July, 1998, one year on, with a view to seeing which are still appearing in print. While these newspapers have as yet to be examined it is a safe bet that many will have reappeared⁶⁷.

⁶⁴) *BT* 2/7/97 p. 14, reader’s letter signed “Businessman”, Craigavon, County Armagh, opening sentence: “For 28 years we have had to suffer the warped ramblings and explanations of Sinn Fein/IRA as they committed atrocity after atrocity and pursued a twin-track approach in the ballot box and the Armalite”. Linking the ballot box and the Armalite is currently common. A similar phrase: “the ballot or the bullet” is associated in Detroit with Malcolm X, politically active from 1953, setting up the Muslim Mosque Incorporated in 1963 and who was shot aged 40 in 1965. A century earlier, in 1856, Abraham Lincoln had said “The ballot is stronger than the bullet.” I am grateful to Alvin Jackson, School of Modern History, The Queen’s University of Belfast, for alerting me to the Malcolm X connection (personal communication) and to Eoghan Williams for details of Malcolm X and for the Abraham Lincoln reference. Another more pacifist version dates back to at least the late 19th century when a Unionist presbyterian [?] clergyman in an election speech in Ireland said something like “We will fight with the ballot box in one hand and the bible in the other.”

“Sinn Fein/IRA” are often linked together in this way in speech to emphasise the close connection between Sinn Féin, the Republican political party and the Irish Republican Army, in order to discredit the party by inferring that it is undemocratic

⁶⁵) For example, *BT* 3/7/97 p. 16, Editorial titled *Images of Drumcree*: “It is to no-one’s credit that despite a year’s warning [the violence there the previous July], the British and Irish governments should be meeting in London today with the fuse of the Drumcree powder keg still burning” – an elaboration of the common oral expression “to defuse the situation.”

⁶⁶) *BT* 4/7/97 p. 15, reader’s letter from Ballyclare, County Antrim.

⁶⁷) A good deal could be done electronically. For a meticulous article on proverbs located electronically see <http://haldjas.folklore.ee/folklore/vol110/toughjob.htm> also available as a printed version (Järv 1999). For more details of the method used see his 1997 article (Järv 1997).

With the situation in Northern Ireland unresolved and the same drastic events regularly looming it is perhaps predictable that the same proverbial expressions will be employed in connection with them. It is interesting to note that at least one which came to light last year because of its use by a key figure (Gerry Adams): *The IRA will not go away* was subsequently observed in the *Belfast Telegraph* to refer to other things, often representing the politically opposite: *We Protestants are not going away*, used in a letter to the editor from a reader with the pen-name Lutheran⁶⁸ and *the marching tradition and culture are seen by many as a witness to their particular faith and will not go away*⁶⁹. When a phrase, however mundane, is used by a public figure its circulation is dramatically boosted. Indeed this expression, having risen to prominence in connection with Northern Ireland, is now being widely used about events elsewhere, for instance, it was heard in January, 1998, on a BBC Radio 4 news programme item about the United States: *The Monika Lewinsky affair will not go away*⁷⁰.

The *Belfast Telegraph* performs a highly significant function in a simple cycle whereby some orally transmitted material is transported briefly into print and subsequently quickly re-enters the oral sphere. The material could be likened to a sample of fish netted for a particular purpose and then released in a myriad of different locations. The chief effect of the brief passage through the printed medium is instant mass dissemination, with, possibly, an added seal of approval or endorsement. These can but enhance its chances of perpetuation.

Comment

This article, in a slightly shorter form, was read as a paper at the 12th International Society for Folk Narrative Research Congress in the section "Narrative Communication and the Media". I would like to record my great appreciation to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for their support manifest in their award to attend the 1998 Congress in Göttingen, Germany.

⁶⁸) *BT* 1/7/97 p. 10, Lutheran, Belfast 5.

⁶⁹) *BT* 3/7/97 p. 16, signed male reader's letter from Castlederg, County Tyrone.

⁷⁰) BBC Radio 4 22/6/98 *PM* weekday news programme at 5 pm, 22/6/98.

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Media & Folklore.
Contemporary Folklore IV

Edited by Mare Kõiva

Tartu 2009

How to cite this article:

Fionnuala Carson Williams (2009). Proverbial Expressions, the Local Press and the Current “Troubles” in Northern Ireland. *Media & Folklore. Contemporary Folklore IV*. Edited by Mare Kõiva. Tartu: ELM Scholarly Press, pp. 216–238.

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