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**Desmond Fennell**

**A New  
Nationalism  
For  
The New Ireland**

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10p

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# **A New Nationalism For The New Ireland**

This lecture was delivered to a Comhairle Uladh seminar in Monaghan on Sunday, 6 August, 1972. In its present, published form, it is addressed to everyone who believes that a new Ireland means *a new Irish nation*, and who wants to help build it in his own way.

DESMOND FENNELL  
Carna, Iarchonnachta  
Lúnasa, 1972

# A NEW NATIONALISM FOR THE NEW IRELAND

AS I understand it, Comhairle Uladh, the Council for Ulster, is working to achieve two aims simultaneously:

1. the establishment in the historic province of Ulster of a network of self-governing communities grouped as four self-governing regions, under a provincial parliament, Dáil Uladh;
2. the integration of this system of self-government with similar systems in the other three provinces of Ireland, under an all-Ireland parliament possessing sovereign powers.

But Comhairle Uladh does not stand alone. The initial impetus which inspired and established it came from the Republican Movement. The scheme of Irish self-government which the Comhairle proposes is the basic plank of the Republican political programme. In Connacht, moreover, a sister-body, Comhairle Chonnacht, has been working for the same project from the Connacht angle. I have collaborated closely with it from the start. And throughout Ireland, during the past year, various groups and individuals have expressed support in varying degrees for the political changes that we are advocating.

So, we can place the work of Comhairle Uladh in context, and describe our common endeavour more adequately, if we put

it like this. The Republican Movement, and a number of groups and individuals who are in some degree inspired by it, have come to the conclusion that it would be a good thing to replace the existing government structures in Ireland by new ones. We are proposing an Irish political commonwealth, based on self-governing district communities of, say, 10-40,000 people. These would be grouped as self-governing regions under four provincial parliaments, with an all-Ireland parliament over all, possessing sovereign powers.\*

In passing, let me remark that I think there is much to be said for including a fourth, non-statutory tier of "community councils" for the parish or similar unit. The Comhairle Chonnacht proposals state: "The parishes will be encouraged to form community councils containing representatives of the local voluntary bodies. These community councils will send one member each to the District Council. The other seats on the District Council will be filled by direct election."

I think it is fair to say that this project, which is barely a year old, came into existence in an *ad hoc* and piecemeal manner. The immediate occasion of its origin was the war in the North; the initial aim, to offer a political solution for the Northern conflict which would "unite Ireland" in a way that might prove acceptable to the Northern Unionists.

However, the project as it has now developed goes far beyond anything that might be required for this aim alone. We are now proposing not merely that the Northern Unionists modify their political allegiance and that the government system in the Six Counties and neighbouring counties be remade from the bottom up. We are also proposing the dismantlement of the 26-county state as it now stands and its replacement by our communitarian and pluralist republic.

I think the time has come for us to realise that our project is enormous in scope, that it will not be achieved tomorrow or next week, and that it will be achieved only if we are able to persuade the peoples of Ireland that it is a good thing. And persuading the

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\*It is worth noting that this proposed scheme of government is supported by the best professional advice in Ireland. See the recommendations of the Study Group established by the Institute of Public Administration, Dublin. These were published by the Institute in the summer of 1971 under the title "More Local Government. A programme for development". The only difference of note—and it is an inessential one—is that the Institute's scheme has counties and regions where we have regions and provinces.

peoples of Ireland that it is a good thing means producing powerful arguments in its favour which go far beyond anything we have yet been saying.

Everywhere throughout Ireland where we put forward our proposals, and try to win people to support our project, we are asked, and will continue to be asked: *why and to what end?* Unless we have an answer to that question which is powerful and effective in Dublin and Connacht, in Belfast and Cork, in Cavan and Carlow, among the different kinds of Irishmen who live in these and other places, we have no chance of success. We might as well abandon the whole endeavour. For the hard fact is that we have no power to move the people of Ireland in the direction we desire except the power of our arguments. And the power of our arguments depends, in turn, on the scope and profundity of our philosophy.

## WHAT IS OUR PHILOSOPHY?

PROJECTS for replacing one system of government with another are pretty commonplace. Some are merely reformist, others radical and revolutionary. Some emanate from governments, others from bodies of citizens. At this moment, schemes of this kind are being put forward or being implemented in various European countries, including Britain, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. (I instance the McRory scheme of local government reform.) And all these schemes seek a variety of different ends, which derive from a similar variety of philosophies.

The philosophy in question may be merely administrative or economic—an application to government structures of standard liberal capitalist thinking. The good sought may be more efficient or less costly administration, or the more effective development of a state's economic resources, leading to a more rapid growth of its economic power.

On the other hand, the philosophy behind a scheme for restructuring government may be humanistic in a social or ethical sense, or in both together. In this case, the proposers of the new system see the existing system as inimical to a good human life, and wish to replace it with a system which will enable the people

to live more humanly. Obviously, such an approach includes concern that the proposed system of government will be administratively efficient and promote economic prosperity. But its first and overriding aim is to promote the quality of human life in the country in question, and it pursues those other aims *within that context*.

Marxist socialism, in theory at least, is a project of this kind. I mean, when a Marxist socialist is arguing that the system of government in a given country should be changed, he does so on the grounds that the change he proposes will not merely *favour* the development of a truly human life there, but *actually bring such a life about*—which is superstition.

This is the sort of context and market-place in which we must take our stand, identify ourselves and sell our goods. Why, and to what end, are we proposing these radical changes in government structures to the people of Ireland? That is the question we must answer persuasively. It is little use for you in Ulster to answer “so that Ireland may be united and we may have peace and justice in Ulster”, if most of the people of Ulster don’t want Ireland united. Where are you left then?

There is little use then in going on to say that a nine-county Ulster would be economically beneficial for the present border counties or for the people living west of the Bann. And neither the first argument nor the second is of any use to those of us who are trying to persuade the people of Connacht or Dublin city to change *their* system of government.

We need to be able to answer the question: why and to what end? so powerfully and persuasively that many different kinds of Irishmen, in different parts of Ireland, will be moved to support our extremely radical project. So we need to have an answer, or a set of arguments, like a tree. Its trunk is the basic, central answer which moves every kind of Irishmen in some degree to support us. Its branches are the special and particular adaptations of that central argument to the diverse groups and situations within Ireland.

But we can have such a tree of persuasion only if we have a philosophy for it to grow out of: a philosophy powerful enough to produce the trunk-answer, and to nourish the branch-answers, to the question: *why and to what end?* So it all comes back to finding for ourselves the dynamic philosophy that we need.

## WE NEED A HUMANIST NATIONALISM

I BELIEVE that if this radically new Ireland is to be “sold” successfully to the different kinds of Irishmen in the different parts of Ireland, much more will be required than the stock arguments of Irish political nationalism and some talk about economic benefits. I am convinced that we need a new Irish nationalism which is also a humanism of man in Ireland. I mean that we must unite with our concern for the Irish nation, a concern for *the quality of human life in Ireland*.

We must show that the structures of government we propose will not only lay the basis for a new and restored Irish nation, but help people to live a freer, more sovereign and human life in Ballyfermot and Foxrock, in the Conamara Gaeltacht and North Leitrim, in Ballymena and the Shankill.

As it so happens, we have the makings of such a philosophy already present in our movement. In what has been said and written hitherto by people involved in it or sympathetic to it, there are two predominant strands: concern for the Irish nation and concern for the quality of human life in Ireland.

The arguments we are using derive from Irish nationalism and from Irish humanism. By humanism, I mean *thoughtful concern* that man live humanly rather than inhumanly, and that he be *enabled* so to live—whether in the Bogside or Ballyfermot, in Iarchoinnachta or Belfast city, in Ballsbridge or Belmullet.

In Comhairle Uladh itself, these two strains are present. The members of the Comhairle have been brought together by their concern for the Irish nation, whether as a reality to be asserted and realised or as a ruin to be reconstructed. Their nationalist concern is reflected in the literature issued by the Comhairle. But at the same time, reflected in the same literature, there is a humanism which regards the centralised, bureaucratic state, and the lack of real self-government which goes with it, as anti-human and anti-people. On these grounds, it advocates their replacement throughout Ireland by real self-government at three levels of society under an all-Ireland parliament and government.

We are lucky that these two streams are to the fore in our movement’s thinking. For they present us with the makings of a truly powerful philosophy and a truly powerful answer to the question: *why and to what end?* All that is required of us is that we *fuse them into a single, coherent unity*.

## WHERE THE REVOLUTION LEFT OFF . . .

IN addressing ourselves to this task, we have the Irish revolutionary movement as our direct inspiration. We are taking up where its leading spirits left off. All of them, from Hyde and Yeats to Pearse and Connolly, Mellows and Collins, were humanists who described their overriding aim as the restoration of man in Ireland to his full human stature.

This is clear, and universally recognised, in regard to Hyde, Yeats, A.E. and others, whose main activity was in the fields of thought, language, propaganda and literary creation. It has been obscured in regard to those revolutionaries whose activity was, in large part, political or military. But it remains a fact, for all that, in their case also.

James Connolly saw the labour struggle as concerned, first and foremost, with the workers' reconquest of their mental and moral manhood. He said: "Every victory for labour helps to straighten the cramped soul of the Irish labourer."

Of the ITGWU he said: "It found the workers of Ireland on their knees; and has striven to raise them to the erect position of manhood; it found them with all the vices of slavery in their souls, and it strove to eradicate these vices and replace them with some of the virtues of free men; it found them with no other weapons of defence than the arts of the liar, the lick-spittle and the toady . . . and it taught them to abhor these arts."

Three months before the rising he said: "Deep in the heart of Ireland has sunk the sense of degradation wrought upon its people . . . so deep and humiliating that no agency less potent than the red tide of war on Irish soil will ever be able to enable the Irish race to recover its self-respect . . . Without the slightest trace of irreverence, but in all due humility and awe, we recognise that of us, as of mankind before Calvary, it may be truly said 'Without the shedding of blood there is no redemption'".

Thomas McDonagh wrote a poem called "The Man Upright" to make the point that the *uprighting* of man in Ireland was what his life's struggle was all about. Pearse's poem "The Rebel" has a similar theme. Pearse also said: "Independence one must understand to include spiritual and intellectual independence as well as political independence."

Terence MacSwiney said: "A man facing life is gifted with certain powers of soul and body . . . In a free State he is in the natural environment for full self-development."

In the Treaty Debate, Liam Mellows said: "We would rather have this country poor and indigent, we would rather have the people of Ireland eking out a poor existence on the soil, as long as they possessed their souls, their minds and their honour. This fight has been for something more than the fleshpots of empires."

Michael Collins said: "The object in building up the country economically must not be lost sight of . . . It is not to show a great national balance-sheet, not to point to a people producing wealth with the self-obliteration of a hive of bees. The real riches of the Irish nation will be the men and women of the Irish nation, the extent to which they are rich in body and mind and character."

That is how these nationalists described what they were about. And if we require more explicit legitimisation for infusing our own nationalism with humanist concern, we have it in Pearse's words in *The Spiritual Nation* where he says: "One loves the freedom of men because one loves men. There is therefore a deep humanism in every true Nationalist. There was a deep humanism in Tone; and there was a deep humanism in Davis."

## TAKING PEARSE AT HIS WORD

"A DEEP humanism in every true Nationalist." Taking Pearse at his word, our task is quite simply to make a *true nationalism* out of the elements of Irish nationalism and humanism which are coming together in our movement. That means forging ourselves an Irish nationalism which is at the same time a humanism, with a message that speaks powerfully to the heart of every man in Ireland *simply because he is a man, a human being*. It means, therefore, sifting through the corpus of Irish nationalism as it has come down to us, and separating the *true* from the *untrue* according to Pearse's criterion.

We *retain* and use those elements which are intelligibly conducive to a truly human life in Ireland (or which can be bent in this direction), we *discard* the rest, and we *re-state* what we have kept in a new, humanistic language. By so doing, we forge ourselves a true Irish nationalism, not merely in the sense that it is

also a humanism, but in the sense, too, that it is *truly Irish nationalism*, no bastard product, but a legitimate renewal and development of our Irish nationalist heritage.

Our inherited concern for the Irish nation is then truly and obviously a concern for man in Ireland; and our concern for the quality of human life in Ireland is integrated with our concern for the Irish nation.

## SKETCHING THE NEW NATIONALISM

LET me sketch for you—very crudely, since it is a first attempt—what this new nationalism might be like and how we might use it to give power and force to our political proposals, both in our own minds and in the minds of all Irish men.

A nation is a *community of communities* that is distinguished from other similar communities around it by its cultural forms and institutions and its way of life. So it is a *distinctive* community of communities, existing in a world of similar, distinct communities. Gaelic Ireland was a nation.

Nations are the social media by which men relate themselves to the world, find the world and themselves intelligible, and find community together. Nations are the social homes of man in the world, enabling him to feel at home in the world in his own village, city or suburb.

People without a nation are homeless in the world. They do not know where they stand and are worried about their very identity. So they find their life together unsatisfactory and meaningless, feel alienated from it, cannot find community together in it. It is a major misfortune for people when their nation collapses or disintegrates, and their misfortune is all the greater if there is no other nation near them with which they can willingly identify.

We recognise that our own nation, the Irish nation, has suffered a historical debacle. Its distinctive mode of human life, its network of cultural forms and native institutions, have largely perished. Most decisively of all, its very fabric—its historic society—has gone to pieces. Where once there was a real, organic society, an Irish community of communities, a *nation*, there is now a shattered and disintegrating social body, a mere “mass” of

individuals and *ad hoc* groupings, lacking a real social dimension to their lives, and displaying almost no distinctive identity in the Anglo-Saxon world apart from a shadowy “Roman Catholicism”.

What has happened to the nation as a whole has happened to its parts. Old rural communities, finding their life devalued and meaningless, have disintegrated. Many of their members have fled to the cities of Ireland, Britain and America. The remnants left behind no longer find a satisfying life together.

Old urban communities, in the centres of the cities and the towns, have been largely destroyed, their members scattered to the refugee camps of new housing estates, hastily erected. Housed there among refugees from the broken rural communities, they form no new community together. They live as a rootless mass, like “little Americas”.

But people need to live in community, and to live rooted lives, if they are to find identity and fulfilment as human beings. *The social collapse of our nation frustrates us all as human beings.*

Moreover, in the Northeastern part of Ireland, an additional factor frustrates the development of a good human life. There, an uprooted mass of our nation, called “the Catholics” because they no longer speak Irish, live in a totally anti-social relationship with a mass of people uprooted from the Scottish and English nations and called “Ulster Protestants” for short. Unloved by the power that protects them, these castaways on an alien island exist in a permanent state of fear and insecurity that thwarts them as human beings.

As Irishmen and as men, we feel challenged by this state of affairs. Our response is as follows. We wish to have a *nation once again*. We wish to build once more an Irish community of communities, a *nation*, in the proper sense of the word.

A nation is not a state—the word has been used in this debased sense only since the French Revolution or thereabouts. A “state”, an autonomous system of civil government, is simply *one* of the things a nation *has*. A nation is not a mass of powerless citizens and obedient consumers, legitimising with their votes, every few years, the rule of a bureaucratic-economic establishment. A nation is that thing which we, as nationalists, propose to build: a distinctive *community of communities*, such as Gaelic Ireland was before its collapse.

Obviously, several different kinds of building activity go to the making of such a community. As nationalists, we are interested

in all of them. But in this particular movement, where we have come together as *political* nationalists or republicans, the specific contribution we wish to make is political. We wish to build an Irish system of self-government, an Irish republic, which will *underpin*, and *promote the development of*, an Irish community of communities throughout all of Ireland.

We see, as the base of this political commonwealth, the district communities of all Ireland: the social units of between 10,000 and 40,000 people in country and city. We propose that as much self-government and self-determination as is practically possible be concentrated in these communities. More radically even than the original Sinn Féiners, we believe in the principle of Irish self-government. We believe that the people of Ireland should *really* govern themselves.

We propose, furthermore, that the district communities be grouped as self-governing regions, under four provincial governments, with a national parliament and government over all. We recall, incidentally, that on the last occasion when anything like an assembly of the old Irish nation took place—at the Confederation of Kilkenny—a similar provincial system of government was put forward and partially implemented. The scheme was drawn up by a Galway lawyer, Patrick D'Arcy.

Clearly, the devolution of government power to the provinces and regions would help to overcome the "regional imbalance" which exists at present in Ireland, as it does in other highly centralised countries. In matters economic and educational, and in regard to access to mass media platforms, all the children of the nation would then have a considerably better chance of equal treatment.

But a special reason we have for proposing the provincial system of government is that it gives major status in the new Ireland to that historic province on which the Ulster Protestants have based their local patriotism. They call themselves Ulstermen, and it is as Ulstermen, in the fullest political sense, that we invite them to play their part in the building of an Irish community of communities.

Notice that when we describe our aim as an *Irish community of communities*, we are saying many things at the same time. For instance, a "community of communities" is both singular and plural. So the republic we propose is a pluralist one, with room in it for all the diversities that exist in Ireland: the diversity of city suburb and small-farmer community, of North Kerry and

East Tyrone, of Irish-speaking communities and an Ulster Protestant community.

Note, too, that the word *community*, properly speaking, does not mean a number of people living alongside each other and governed from elsewhere. It implies and means a group of people making their life together jointly, and hence an *autonomous* or self-governing group of people. So just as our basic communities will be self-governing within the nation, it goes without saying that our national community will be self-governing within the world. Otherwise, it would not be a community.

In short, the Ireland we propose will not merely be politically "Gaelic", but politically "free" as well. We need it to be politically free *as a whole*, so that it can be politically free *in its parts*. We need it to be a real community, i.e. governing itself, so that it can ensure the autonomy and freedom of its component communities and its individual citizens. So when we say "an Irish community of communities", we mean it very literally indeed.\*

Moreover, when we talk of "building an Irish community of communities", we are talking of building an Irish Ireland: an *Ireland shaped by Irishmen*. The republic we propose will be an *Irish* republic, not merely a republic located in Ireland and functioning through British institutions and laws.

Since our nation collapsed, and its Irish institutions and forms disappeared, we have been living within a set of alien institutions and forms, imposed on us, and copied by us, from outside. We have lived like lodgers in our own home, not having it as a home really, not shaping it creatively to suit our idiosyncracies and our taste.

When I was writing for the *Sunday Press*, a reader wrote to me as follows:

It is as if the Irish people are still living as an underground movement in their own country. The "shape" of Irish society and institutions fits the Irish people like a badly tailored suit. We do not acknowledge the suit as our own; we do not feel at home in it, but we tolerate it as we have always tolerated everything. I never hear Irishmen talking about *our* courts, *our* gardai, *our* representatives, etc. There is a disillusionment and phrases like "Is this what it was all for?"

\*When I say "community", the Irish word I have in mind is that very earthy and concrete word *pobal*. A community of communities is *pobal pobal*.



The Ireland we propose will not make its citizens feel like that, for its tailors will be the citizens themselves. It will be an *Irish* commonwealth, shaped by all living Irishmen, and therefore an Irish Ireland in the political sense, which will encourage the making of an Irish Ireland in all senses. We are much more radical in our approach to the making of an Irish Ireland than those who imagined you would make Ireland Irish merely by having the people use Gaelic words.

There are many other things one could say about the implications of our proposals, both in a nationalist and a humanist sense. We could point out that our system of government would mean the introduction of democracy to Ireland in place of the confidence tricks which are called by that name now, North and South.

We could point to an interesting fact which you may have noticed. In the very act of describing and presenting this new nationalism, we are giving new life to old words and slogans, giving flesh to dead words, *reviving language*. That is only to be expected. Every revolutionary movement, and every fresh start of a revolutionary movement, begins with a language revival—and continues for so long as its new, revived language remains vital and alive. The initial revolution is always in the sphere of language.

But I wish to pass on to sketch briefly what sort of action this new nationalism would lead us to engage in, whether in Comhairle Uladh or Comhairle Chonnacht or in any other such bodies that may come into being.

## FROM PHILOSOPHY TO ACTION

THIS new nationalism impels us to a programme of action which can be divided, somewhat artificially, into three phases. The division is artificial because, once the action has begun, all three phases overlap and occur simultaneously.

The three phases are (1) the projection of elementary vision, (2) the building of the new nation, (3) the fight against its enemies.

### The projection of elementary vision

We begin by giving an overall view of what we propose and why. We publish a map showing the existing structure of government in Ireland, and another showing the system we propose. Each is accompanied by brief explanatory notes.

This means we must choose district areas within each province—districts which have ascertainable boundaries—and group them in regions, indicating the regional administrative centres. We make Dublin and Belfast cities into regions in their own right and publish supplementary maps showing their division into districts. Thus we propose from the outset the transformation of these shapeless urban masses into self-governing communities of communities. Finally, we decide where the new political capital is to be and indicate this on the map of Ireland.

While distributing these maps, we explain what we are about in the terms I have outlined. We make clear that we wish to build a new Irish nation so that the quality of life in Ireland will be changed radically for the better. We explain that the present structures of government in city and country, North and South, are frustrating and reducing people by thwarting community. And we show how our proposed community of communities will set life in Ireland moving in a healthier, pro-people direction.

To carry out this work of explanation, we establish a national and provincial press.

### Building the new nation

Looking around Ireland in the light of this elementary vision, we examine the basic level of society, where the basic political communities are to emerge. We discern district groupings here and there which are struggling to re-assert themselves as communities or to become communities for the first time.

We notice the similarities between the Gaeltacht districts and the Dublin Liberties. We see that Ballyfermot and Andersonstown are similar in one way, Ardoyne, the Shankill and the Bogside in another way, and that there is yet another kind of similarity linking Iarchonnachta, the Bogside, North Leitrim and South Fermanagh.

In some of these we notice that there are self-appointed "community development" bodies with purely economic or "social amenity" aims. In others we see advanced forms of representative structures, but no impulse towards self-government. In

a few cases, such as the Gaeltacht districts, Ballyfermot, the Dublin Liberties and the Bogside, we notice that concern for community has got to the point where self-government is being worked towards and demanded.

In all of these stirrings, we see the political base of the new community of communities that we propose to build. In all of them, we recognise the basic material of our new humanist nationalism. For we believe that, whether there are two states in Ireland, or one or five, *it is good and important that people should be trying to build community together in their own localities.*

So we support and encourage all these efforts, make them aware of each other, put them in touch, help them to develop a common consciousness and a common purpose. All of them *have* a common purpose, but they are not yet conscious of it. All of them are trying to find a better way in which groups of 10–40,000 people can live together. That is enough of a purpose for a start. Our first work is to strengthen their efforts and help them forward by making them aware that they have this common purpose.

Prompted by the kind of nationalism I have outlined, I have made some tentative efforts in this direction. I have written in the papers about Iarchonnachta, the Dublin Liberties, Ballyfermot, North Leitrim and the Bogside, treating their problems in common, pointing out the differences of approach and the common need of self-government.

I have quoted for them that resolution of the Council of Europe Deliberative Assembly of May 14, 1969, which begins:

1. The autonomy of a local community is the right of that community to manage under its own responsibility its own affairs with a freely-elected assembly.
2. The principle of local autonomy shall be embodied in the constitution of each state.

I noticed, a short time later, that the Dublin Liberties association was no longer merely asking Dublin Corporation to “save” the Liberties, but was demanding that the Liberties get back the powers of self-government which they once had. Perhaps I had played some part in this small advance.

I went to Belfast and talked to an officer of the People’s Assembly of Ardoyne and to a man connected with the efforts to establish a community council in Andersonstown. I met people connected with Ballymurphy Enterprises. I made enquiries about

the community-building work of the Northern Resistance Movement and heard from a Protestant member of the New Ireland group about a community self-help scheme near Ballymena.

To all those I met, I talked about our struggle in Iarchonnachta, about North Leitrim and Claremorris, Ballyfermot and Finglas, and about the representative council for 25,000 people which had been established in the Donegal Gaeltacht. I mentioned the ideas of Dr. Ivor Browne, the Dublin psychiatrist, in regard to “man in the modern city” and his need for community. I showed them the literature of Comhairle Chonnacht and urged them to read the report of the Institute of Public Administration in Dublin on the reorganisation of government to suit the citizen rather than the bureaucrat.

But the essential point I tried to get across was that all these groups should be in touch with each other—that we must breach the mental barrier which compartmentalises Irish community-building effort into “the North”, Dublin, “the West”, the Gaeltacht, and so on, as if all of these efforts had nothing in common.

All of us were in fact engaged in trying to find out how groups of 10–40,000 people could find a better life together in Ireland today. Would it not be a good idea to hold an all-Ireland conference, by invitation, on that subject?

In Derry, later, I said the same things to a member of the Bogside community association and to one of those connected with the proposed Free Derry Council. But in Derry I also talked about what I had seen and learned in Belfast.

I was glad to hear some time later that members of Ardoyne People’s Assembly had visited the Bogside. And recently I have read in the papers that a working relationship has been established between the Bogside and Ballyfermot community associations.

I have given you this account of my own groping efforts to show what one man can do in this field, almost in his spare time. It is one way of suggesting to you what we will be able to do together if we work together along these lines.

Quite certainly, all these local community efforts, and others which have not yet started or barely started, need us—need our overall vision and purpose—if they are to achieve anything permanent or really valuable. Unless they coordinate their efforts and direct them towards the building of a *community of communities* in each city and region, and further, towards a commu-

nity of communities throughout Ireland, they will calcify or lose heart and, one way or other, be in vain.

You cannot really change the social part unless you change the social whole of which it is a part. The history of Ireland in the last 100 years is littered with local community-building efforts that have failed.

We can help community-building groups by making them aware of their already existing common purpose; by giving them our greater, *nation-building* purpose; and by starting similar movements, alongside them, in districts where nothing is stirring at all. We can help by offering new groups and old our scheme of district councils—inviting their comments, and revising our scheme if their suggestions seem sound. And we can point the way forward beyond the district councils by asking provincial conferences of community groups to comment on our proposed *regions* and to suggest alterations.

The point of our activity at the district, regional and provincial levels must be to get a social dynamic moving in the regions and provinces of Ireland. I mean a broad movement of people seeking to build the humanly structured republic that we propose. That social dynamic, if we could bring it about, would be *the new Irish nation in the making*. It would be the rallying point and standard towards which we would invite all the peoples of Ireland, Catholic and Protestant, urban and rural, North and South, to move.

Let me stress this. Our new nation-building will begin, if it is to begin at all, by getting a social dynamic moving which, by the very force of its arguments and example, by its sincere and obvious love of people and their welfare, gradually draws all Ireland into the work of new nation-building—even those who thought they were enemies of the Irish nation and that the Irish nation was a threat to them.

In this regard, it is worth reflecting that the basic reason why we still have the terrible state of anti-community that exists in the North is that the Irish nationalists and republicans of Ulster, *on both sides of the border*, never got any such social dynamic going.

They did not begin to build, on both sides of the border, in Belfast city, and despite all discouragement and opposition, a form of social life so new and humanly attractive that unionist Ulster wanted to share in it and help to build it. I hope that they

will start to do this now, in union with the nationalists and republicans of all Ireland.

The Gaels and Normans built a new, mixed nation together which was not merely the earlier Gaelic nation but a new creation. But the reason why they built it *together* was that the Normans found the Gaelic way of life irresistibly attractive to begin with, and so richly human in its ethos that it had a place for the Norman ethos too.

I have dwelt on the fact that a basis for our nation-building action already exists in local community efforts. But there are also some stirrings at regional level which should interest us.

In particular, there is the movement towards a regional authority in North Munster, the so-called "Mid-west region". At present, this is an autocratic and paternalist affair. But much good work is being done in developing a regional consciousness, and the regional boundaries are well chosen. It remains for us to fill this framework with our democratic structures—and to encourage the same sort of development in other well-defined regions.

In the Northeast, there is a strong regional consciousness "east" and "west" of the Bann. Hitherto this has received no administrative expression. It is up to us to see that it does, quite regardless of whether or not the regions in question form part of some sort of "Northern Ireland".

At the *provincial* level, everything remains to be done. The four provinces of Ireland were forgotten and ignored, except for football, until we began to propose that they should come into their own again as social and political personalities.

### Fighting the enemies of the nation

Time is pressing, so I will simply point out that the enemies of the old nation and of our new nation-building work are identical, and that they are three in number.

The first enemy is the people's *lack of vision*. I mean, they do not see that human life is a really *good life*; that life in Ireland is human life; and is therefore a *good, adequate and lovable life*, both *as a whole* and *in all its parts*. This is the full and real vision of their life which people need if they are to build a nation. It is the vision whose loss makes a nation perish, and without which no nation is re-built.

The second enemy of the nation is the people's *depression* which results from their lack of such vision. I mean their deep-down feeling of fear, insecurity, apathy, powerlessness and worthlessness; their belief that life—but especially their own particular life—is radically defective or deprived, or mortally threatened. Hence their alienation from their own life, their clinging feeling of dependence on powers other than themselves, their credulous belief in facile “remedies”, their hankering after external and alien *upholders, protectors* and *saviours* (e.g. the Foreign Industrialist).

The third enemy of the nation is the *power structure* which has built itself up on the people's depression. As the people lost their self-confidence and their sense of self-worth, they yielded power over their minds and lives to others. That mass of alienated power now forms the power structure which we call liberal capitalism or imperialism—in its governmental, economic, ideological, verbal and military forms. Concentrated in the power centres of London and Dublin, its network of material and mental domination reaches into every part of Ireland.

It is a dynamic power structure, continually seeking increase. We are familiar with its violent assaults on the remnants of community in Ireland. Its purpose, now as before, is to convert the peoples of Ireland into a single, undifferentiated, shapeless mass of unisex units, which can be housed, administered, taught, taxed, sold to and put to work, with maximum efficiency and at minimum cost, so as to yield a maximum concentration of power for those who hold power in London and Dublin.

This is the context in which we must see the actions of London's army in the North; the progressive destruction of urban democracy in Dublin; the physical and social destruction of Dublin; London's economic imperialism in Ireland; the violence of the Dublin mass media\* against Catholicism in Ireland, the Orange Order, local government bodies, the people of Limerick and Galway, the West of Ireland, the GAA (till it lifted its games ban), and the Republican Movement; the violence of the Dublin Department of Education throughout most of Ireland, as it closes schools and imposes schools against the people's wishes; the violence of the Department of Health as it disempowers the county

\*“Mass media violence” does not mean “journalistic criticism”. It means smearing, sneering and hostile misrepresentation by the mass media. Typical forms of mass media violence are smear-and-sneer campaigns, verbal bullying, character assassination, selective indignation, the creation of bogeys to frighten people, and the hostile slanting of news.

councils and overrides the regional health boards; the violence done to society in the Midlands, West and Northwest by Dublin's industrialisation policies; the violence of Dublin's long-standing denial of the distinct Ulster Protestant identity, and its imperialist attempt to annexe Northern Ireland to the Dublin power sphere; the destructive violence of the Dublin economic and political system against the Gaeltacht, and its refusal to give the Gaeltacht people control of their own affairs.

Clearly, the temptation is to respond to all this violence with counter-violence. But there are four good reasons for not doing so, or rather for doing so sparingly, with careful choice of occasion, and with a precise and limited aim.

Firstly, the violence at the disposal of the system is enormously greater than the violence we could employ. Secondly, our primary aim is to build rather than to destroy. Thirdly, even if we could destroy the power-system physically, we would still not have tackled the people's depression and lack of vision which have produced the oppressive structure, and which would *quickly produce something like it again*.

Fourthly, and most decisively, the only ultimately effective way of defeating the enemies of the nation, and building an Irish community of communities, is to supply the people with the vision which they lack and encourage them to seek it. If this is done, and vision gradually regained, the peoples of Ireland will turn towards their life together, valuing and loving it, and start to build it.

As they do this, *they* will become the power. The structure which oppresses them will fall away of its own accord, just as the British state in Ireland fell away, for a time, after the establishment of the Sinn Féin Dáil and the First Republic by a handful of visionaries.

Obviously, the full work of supplying the vision which the people and the nation need goes beyond our powers and scope as *political nationalists*. But we can make our contribution, and urge others to make theirs.

We, for our part, can try to see and grasp that human life is a really *good life*; that life in Ireland is human life; and is therefore a *good, adequate* and *lovable life*, both *as a whole* and *in all its parts*. And as we begin to see that this is so, and how and why it is so, we can illustrate the fact, and make it somewhat evident to others, by our speeches and writings, our manner of

living and acting, our maps, explanations and proposals, and our organisational activity generally.

We strike a bigger blow for the new nation by publishing inspiring proposals for a new educational system in Connacht, and by getting Connacht people to see that *they can implement them*, than by blowing up the Department of Education. For as things stand, all that would happen in the latter case is that the Connacht newspaper editors and bishops would condemn this "dastardly act" and the Department of Education would move to new premises.

## IN CONCLUSION

IN conclusion, let me remind you that I have been discussing the application of our new, humanist nationalism to the political sphere and, in particular, to the political goals we have set ourselves. Clearly, the Irish community of communities that we envisage will need more than a political structure that is favourable to community.

Men are more than citizens, and a human community is more than a life in common within political structures. The Irish social personality that we wish to build will need mental and language structures, religious and economic structures, that are conducive to community too. Builders are needed in these spheres as well.

The value of having an *Irish community of communities* as the overriding goal of Irish nationalism is that it challenges every kind of Irishman to be a nationalist *in some sense*. It makes the nation *the highest value, within Ireland*, that an Irishman can work for, whatever his special talent.

It gives us, moreover, a measure by which to discern which are the pro-national, which the anti-national, forces and institutions in Irish life. The measure is the simple question: are they contributing to or impeding the development of an Irish community of communities?

Straight away, we notice, for instance, that the structure of the Catholic Church, with its team of self-appointed officials administering a powerless mass of laity, is as anti-national as the Dublin state. We see that the Presbyterian church structure is more conducive to community-building, but that Presbyterians,

like other Protestants, are anti-national in their conformity to liberal capitalist individualism and liberal capitalism generally.

We notice that no body which calls itself a "church" is doing what the Church is primarily supposed to do: providing the people with that good vision of their life which enables them to found and build community.

Then again, we see that the provincial-mindedness of our universities, and the derivative nature of Irish intellectual life generally, are not serving the building of an Irish nation which must, of necessity, have its own native structure of vision—a mind of its *own*.

As for the economic structures, there is little for us to notice that has not been observed already. The fact that they are anti-human, anti-community and anti-national has been pointed out many times.

The specific work which has brought us together is the political work of nation-building—the forging of structures of self-government which will make a new Irish nation possible. As nationalists, some of us will want to make a contribution in the intellectual, religious, linguistic or economic domains as well. But it must be obvious that the success of our political building depends on others, with little interest in government structures, devoting themselves *primarily* to those other spheres.

Moreover, since we are the initiators of this movement towards a new Irish nation, we owe it to ourselves to try to recruit collaborators in those other fields. We can do this by telling all sorts of people that our overriding goal is to build a *community of communities* throughout Ireland, and by showing them that it lies in their interest—and that they are morally obliged—to contribute their own special talents towards that end.

P.S.: I said above that a nation is "a distinctive community of communities existing in a world of similar, distinct communities". And the fact is that it is only in a world of nations (rather than power blocs and masses) that any nation, including the Irish one, can exist. Also I have stressed the absolute necessity, if we are to build a nation once again, of winning a new and good image of man or of human life in general. But obviously, if we do this, we shall not be able to keep it secret and it will found more new nations than our own.

So, in effect, a necessary and inevitable by-product of our work of nation-building in Ireland will be the building of a new world of nations. But that dimension of our venture lies beyond the scope of this pamphlet.

—D.F.

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Published by Comhairle Uladh, 21 Park Street, Monaghan.

Printed by Abbey Printers (Cavan) Ltd., Cavan

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