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Making peace with the past is last major issue

(Breidge Gadd, [Irish News](#))

The peace process here does progress literally by fits and starts.

Nothing much seems to happen for a time, then there is noticeable movement, such as the republicans' historic change of approach regarding policing.

This is invariably followed by people – usually political grandees – throwing a fit about a comparatively minor issue. Then everyone assimilates the latest developments into their political psyche and readjusts their prognosis for the future.

The last few weeks have had quite a share of starts, with the O'Loan report followed swiftly by republicans' policing decision. We then had the storm in a teacup fuss over the poorly-worded SDLP advertisement but no doubt we'll settle down again.

This strategy seems to be working though and in our stop/start way all the obstacles to devolved power sharing have been removed.

There is nothing else we can ask republicans to do. They have conceded every demand made on them. The only thing that will stop power sharing is the determination of unionists not to. And we will know their answer to that question in a few short weeks after the election.

A no vote will be a clear message to both London and Dublin that Northern Ireland as a separate political entity is ungovernable and that the two governments will have to make long-term alternative arrangements.

This is a road hopefully we will not need to go down. Having come so far together it is not overly optimistic to hope that soon we will have our own assembly back and politicians can begin to work together on the big issues that impact on people's lives now and in the future, not exercise their political skill on reminding us of what happened 10, 20 or 40 years ago.

It is vital that this new assembly does look forward and is not dragged back into recriminations about the past.

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How, then, do they handle the pain and hurt that still dominates some people to the extent that their future possibilities are still trapped in their past?

There has been endless talk of what might help move everyone on together, whether it be a truth commission, more judicial tribunals or something else. There are and have been also many good projects supporting victims and communities.

Understandably they have not achieved their full potential, as such schemes tend to be localised and because of lack of funding, short lived.

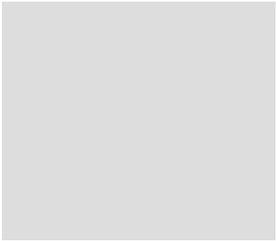
An assembly should be able to do better in future. Now that we can have a fresh start it is imperative that our own elected politicians make provision for remembering the past, not by continuing to make this issue a political football but by funding and properly funding, secular society to enable us to make as much peace as possible with our past.

The politicians will not have to look far for a vehicle to take this sensitive issue forward. Healing Through Remembering is a non-political, broadly representative group working quietly since 2002 to find ways to help us move forward.

Their recent report [*Making Peace with the Past*](#), compiled after opportunities for wide consultation, makes six recommendations: establishment of a network linking together and thus synergising all the diverse forms of remembering work; a storytelling process collected from all who want to tell of their experiences of the conflict – a process standardised and recorded; a day of reflection, serving as an universal gesture of recognition; a permanent living memorial museum – a dynamic memorial to all those affected by the conflict; acknowledgement – that all organisations involved in the conflict including the British and Irish states honestly and publicly acknowledge responsibility for past political violence due to their acts of omission or commission.

Obviously some of these recommendations, particularly the last, will be more controversial than others but as Healing through Remembering points out, successful implementation will depend on correct timing and all-community support.

This organisation has now asked for all-party political support. The new assembly should recognise its worth and its work, acknowledge that making peace with the past is our last outstanding major issue, fund Healing Through Remembering properly and then ask it to take forward its recommendations on all our behalf.



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