

This is It!

A community play by

Andy Tyrie

Sammy Duddy

Michael Hall

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The **Island Pamphlets** series was launched in 1993 to stimulate a community-wide debate on historical, cultural, political and socio-economic issues. Most of the pamphlets are edited accounts of discussions undertaken by small groups of individuals – the ‘**Community Think Tanks**’ – which have embraced (on both a ‘single identity’ and a cross-community basis) Loyalists, Republicans, community activists, women’s groups, victims, cross-border workers, ex-prisoners, young people, senior citizens and others. To date 134 titles have been produced and 201,500 pamphlets have been distributed at a grassroots level. Many of the titles are available for (free) download from <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/islandpublications>.

Introduction

In 1984, during one of my many bouts of despondency over Northern Ireland's unrelenting violence, I came across a thin volume of poems by Sammy Duddy, *Concrete Whirlpools of the Mind*, and was surprised, and indeed heartened, by the content. The author was the Public Relations Officer for the Ulster Defence Association, the largest of the Loyalist working-class paramilitary organisations, some of whose members had been responsible for a catalogue of sectarian killings. And yet, although many of Duddy's poems reflected all the self-certainties of a staunch 'defender of Ulster', others spoke of young men from both Protestant and Catholic working-class backgrounds being duped by politicians and warped by history into killing one another in a fratricidal conflict.

The poems served as a vivid reminder that within *all* those organisations which had sprung up from the grassroots, on both sides of our communal divide, a wide diversity of attitudes co-existed – the monolithic stereotypes so beloved by the media did not reflect the actual reality.

Wishing to encourage the type of progressive views expressed in the poems, a week later I found myself in the East Belfast office of the UDA's Chairman, Andy Tyrie. I explained that I worked with individuals and groups in both communities, and that as far as I was concerned Republicans, Loyalists and our assorted politicians were all making a bloody mess of things. Tyrie heard me out patiently, then said: "Sit yourself down and we'll have a talk."

That discussion and the ones which followed revealed to me much more of the tensions and contradictions which resided within the Protestant working class. Yes, within that community there existed the anti-Catholic bigots, but there also existed humane people who fervently wanted to see a new society emerge, who were willing to reach an honourable accommodation with their Catholic neighbours. Yes, there were those whose politics were on the extreme Right, but there were also those with family traditions of long involvement in Northern Ireland's Labour movement. There were the bewildered, the betrayed, the angry, the embittered, the dangerous and the reactionaries, as well as the idealists and the progressives – all were there, side by side.

The most paradoxical aspect was that not only were these internal tensions and contradictions mostly hidden from the general public, but even within the Protestant community they had never been fully aired or explored. This was partly a legacy of the violence which had forced many ordinary people to ‘keep their heads down and their mouths shut’, but also because there were no forums to begin this exploration, no vehicles to carry forward any public debate. We discussed ways of initiating such a debate, and the barriers we would encounter, not least the suspicion which would inevitably be engendered by an overtly ‘political’ approach, especially at a time when the Protestant community felt itself increasingly under siege. Tyrie suggested taking the debate into Loyalist pubs and clubs in a less threatening, more entertaining, and hopefully more thought-provoking manner – by presenting these contradictions in a play. Could I help them accomplish this? he asked.

And out of this discussion ***This is It!*** was conceived, with Tyrie suggesting both the title and the plot – that of a young Protestant, who in 1981, convinced that his beloved Ulster is in a ‘do or die’ situation, decides to join the Rev. Ian Paisley’s ‘Third Force’. This seemed an appropriate story-line, for the way the ‘Big Man’ was viewed within the Protestant working class reflected many of that community’s internal contradictions. While some castigated him as a latter-day ‘Grand Old Duke of York’ who had helped fill the prisons with young working-class Loyalists because of the way they had responded to his fiery rhetoric, many others viewed him with unquestioning respect.

After we had finished the play *Theatre Ireland* requested a copy and, after reading it, asked if they could publish the entire script inside their magazine. In their pre-publicity handout they considered it a very progressive document, and welcomed its intended performance in clubs and pubs as a purposeful use of drama.

The play had poems and songs in it, and was probably too lengthy, and it was only then that we realised there was a dearth of actors within the Protestant working class, certainly at that time. Then, to my great surprise, Tyrie said to me: “You see your friends over in Ballymurphy? [I had told Tyrie that I also worked closely with Father Des Wilson.] Could you get *them* to perform it and I’ll guarantee their safety in Loyalist areas?”

[Father Wilson was a co-founder of Ballymurphy People’s Theatre, and was always very supportive of the idea of using drama to engender radical political and social debate, and he would also have been very open-minded regarding differing viewpoints being expressed. Furthermore, along with Father Alec Reid, he had promoted, and engaged in, dialogue with unionists and loyalists. He had also written a fictional work, *The Demonstration*, which contained an appeal for working-class unity, something which also figured strongly in *This is It!*]

However, any progress on Tyrie’s suggestion stalled after the BBC asked us if we could rewrite the play for radio, but on the condition that it wasn’t performed anywhere before it was aired. The BBC involvement ultimately proved fruitless and time-wasting. And although the play was never to see a live performance, either on a stage or radio, it *was* used by a number of community groups as a ‘reading script’.

2022 Postscript

At the time the play was written no-one in the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist [PUL] community could ever have imagined that the DUP would eventually jettison its ‘Never, Never, Never!’ stance and enter into power-sharing with Sinn Féin. Nor could anyone have imagined that the Rev. Ian Paisley, as First Minister of a new Northern Ireland Assembly, would quickly establish a close rapport with his Deputy First Minister, former IRA commander Martin McGuinness – so much so that their detractors sarcastically labelled them ‘the chuckle brothers’.

The Rev. Paisley died in September 2014, Martin McGuinness in March 2017. Sammy Duddy, co-writer of this play, died of a heart attack in October 2007.

Why re-publish the play now? Mainly because many community activists in the PUL community feel that the need for an in-depth community debate – such as was the original purpose of the play – remains more pressing than ever, and the internal tensions within Loyalism and Unionism are still as divisive.

For this reprint the original has been revised somewhat. The poems and songs have been deleted, partly because they were not vital to the plot, but also because the play required shortening. Some of the political lecturing has also been trimmed, without losing the essential thrust of the arguments being presented.

Michael Hall

Prologue

To remind the audience just how much fear, uncertainty and anger was building up in Northern Ireland over the period leading up to the massed display of the ‘Third Force’ in Newtownards, all (*or at least a selection*) of the following items should be read out by a **NARRATOR**:

September 1981

- 5th Off-duty soldier shot dead in University area of Belfast.
- 6th Detective fighting for his life after being gunned down leaving Mass in Armagh.
- 7th Two teenage policemen on first patrol blown to pieces in 700lb landmine explosion.
- 13th UDR man fatally shot in back, Maghera.
- 14th RUC Reservist murdered after seeing his wife (who had just had their second child) at Mid-Ulster Hospital in Magherafelt.
- 19th Catholic man murdered on Ormeau Road, Belfast. UFF claim responsibility.
- 22nd Two soldiers seriously injured when terrorists fired into their Land Rover.
- 26th RUC man shot dead in Killough public house, Co Down.
- 27th Youth found shot dead in Republican area of Belfast.
- 28th RUC man killed in rocket attack on Land Rover.
- 29th Part-time UDR man shot dead as he left Mackies Foundry, Belfast.

October

- 3rd Republican Hunger Strike, during which ten hunger strikers had died, ended today.
- 5th *New Letter* states that 64 people died during the seven months of the Hunger Strike • Former UDR man murdered in grounds of Altnagelvin Hospital.
- 8th City Councillor – a Hunger Strike supporter – dies in gun attack on club in Belfast.
- 11th IRA nail bomb in London: one woman dead, 46 soldiers and civilians injured.
- 12th Catholic man shot dead in his Belfast living room by UFF.
- 13th Second person – a teenager – dies from London nail-bomb attack.
- 16th UDA welfare officer shot dead by INLA. UDA appeals for restraint.

- 17th Sir Stewart Pringle loses leg after bomb attack at his home in London.
- 19th UDA blames RUC for shooting dead one of its men at a police checkpoint.
- 21st UDR Sergeant shot dead by man disguised as postman.
- 26th Police explosives expert killed by IRA bomb in London's Oxford Street.

November

- 4th UDA man killed by UFF.
- 6th Summit talks lead to Anglo-Irish Council. Paisley says his fears were justified.
- 7th Boy, 17, killed by booby-trap car explosion intended for his UDR father.
- 10th Former UDR man murdered three miles from where the teenager was killed on 7th.
- 11th UDR part-timer, injured on 9th, dies.
- 12th RUC Reservist loses both legs in car booby-trap explosion. • Rev John Batchelor says: "The time for talking has passed; we cannot allow one more death... I call upon the British Government to use the manpower that is available and to legitimately mobilise a third force to smash the terrorism in our midst."
- 13th Presbyterian Moderator the Right Rev Dr John Girvan accuses the government of putting political restraints on the security forces.
- 14th The Unionist MP Robert Bradford and a community worker shot dead.
- 15th Catholic youth shot dead in Belfast's Short Strand.
- 16th First appearance of the 'Third Force', when more than 500 men march in Enniskillen. • Paisley pledges to make the Province ungovernable. • Orange Order leader Rev Martin Smyth welcomes moves throughout the country to prepare the people for guaranteeing their own security. • RUC Reservist shot in Newry.
- 17th Off-duty UDR man shot dead in what the *News Letter* calls "a bid to push Loyalists over the brink." • Secretary of State, Jim Prior, jostled and kicked by an angry crowd at the Dundonald service for Robert Bradford. • Catholic man murdered in Craigavon. • Police Reservist, wounded two months previously, dies. • British Army announces it is sending in 600 more men. • Paisley plans 'Day of Action' against the Anglo-Irish talks and the deteriorating security situation. The protest is to include a mass parade in Newtownards of the Third Force. • All over the Province towns grind to a halt at memorial services for Robert Bradford. A tribute read out at various

services says: "...The best way we could honour his memory is to forge this day an unbreakable link among all the Unionist people who are prepared to fight and if need be to die to save Ulster from the IRA terrorists and the treachery of the Thatcher administration."

- 18th 57-year-old former UDR man murdered by IRA as he drives home. • At a press conference Paisley says: "We want all political restraints and handcuffs taken off the security forces and a real war carried out against the IRA. They must flush out the Republican enclaves." He claimed he would teach Mrs Thatcher a "severe lesson" on Monday, but would not give exact details of his 'Day of Action'. He warned that "the full orchestra has not been played yet." At another press conference he told Loyalists they were now in a "do or die situation".
- 19th Part-time UDR man murdered in Strabane. • The Workers Party warns that the Provisional IRA was bent on producing a 'river of blood' in Northern Ireland. The Party said the Provisionals were intent on pushing the Protestants out of Ulster. • UDA-dominated Ulster Loyalist Central Co-ordinating Committee decides not to take part in Paisley's 'Day of Action'.
- 20th The 'Day of Action' has failed to win outright support from either industrialists or trade union leaders. Paisley admits his political future is on the line: "I have taken a risk in calling this Day of Action. I have staked my credibility on it." • Several hundred members of the Third Force parade in Carrickfergus. • Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich says: "What we need now is an end to violent deeds before the whole population is engulfed in an orgy of death and destruction." • Unionist MP Harold McCusker attacks unions and traders for their reluctance to join in the 'Day of Action'. • Paisley forecasts that the Shipyard would demonstrate that it "will not fail Ulster in this hour of crisis."
- 21st For the first time guns are produced at a Third Force demonstration in Londonderry.
- 23rd Rev Ian Paisley's 'Day of Action' and mass demonstration by Third Force in Newtownards . . .

This is It!

Characters:

BILLY (young working-class Protestant)

Billy's FATHER

Billy's MOTHER

DAVE (UDA sergeant)

ALAN (Dave's friend; a cynic)

TOMMY (extreme right-wing Loyalist)

JAMES (DUP shopkeeper)

SAM (well-respected older man)

BERT (barman)

MAGGIE (member of bar staff)

Stage settings:

There are only two settings: (1) Billy's home and (2) interior of a pub. A table and chairs remain centre stage throughout, used for both settings. Behind the table and chairs is a bar counter (which can be hidden, if felt necessary, by a backdrop during the two 'home' scenes).

Scene 1

Date: Sunday 22 November 1981

Setting: A Protestant working-class home, Belfast

[FATHER *is sitting at the table, facing audience, reading a Sunday paper. BILLY paces up and down, before going over to right of stage where he bends down to rummage in a small holdall. He mutters irritatedly as he does so. FATHER glances over, then resumes reading. BILLY, in obvious exasperation, begins to bundle all the contents out of the holdall: clothes, towel, rain-mac, etc., muttering even louder. FATHER stares at him, baffled.*]

BILLY: Da – did you take my shaver out of here!

FATHER: Aye, I did, right enough. I needed it earlier.

BILLY: [*In annoyance*] I've only been lookin' for it for the last bloody hour!

FATHER: Well, you never said! I'm not a bloody mind-reader, am I?

BILLY: [*Quietly*] Only when anyone's lookin' money – then it's the fastest exit ever.

FATHER: What was that?

BILLY: Oh, nothin'. [*Pause*] Well – where is it?

FATHER: Ah . . . in the bathroom, isn't it?

BILLY: No, da, it's not in the bathroom.

FATHER: Wait, maybe it's in my bedroom.

BILLY: Oh aye, and how was I to know it was in there?

FATHER: It's not the other side of the bloody moon, is it!

[*BILLY just shakes his head, and repacks the holdall. He walks across the stage a few times, gathering up other items.*]

BILLY: [*Loudly, to off-stage*] Ma! Have I any clean socks?

MOTHER: [*Voice coming from off-stage*] They're over a chair, son.

[*BILLY walks over to one of the chairs, over which clothes are draped.*

FATHER shakes his head, obviously distracted, but once again resumes his reading. BILLY walks across the stage again.]

BILLY: Ma! Have you seen my . . .

FATHER: [*Unable to contain himself any longer*] Will you for Christsakes quit traipsin' up and down! Are you and yer ma lookin' to make me buy a new carpet or somethin'!

BILLY: That'll be the day.

FATHER: What on earth are you doing?

BILLY: I'm gettin' stuff together.

FATHER: I can bloody well see that! But what's got you so . . . so agitated?

BILLY: [*Very serious*] Do you not feel it, da? Can you not sense what's in the air!

FATHER: [*Puzzled*] *What* are you on about?

BILLY: [*Shaking his head in amazement*] God! [*Then, defeatedly*] I don't know, I just don't know . . .

FATHER: You don't know? Well, if you don't bloody know, how do you expect me to!

BILLY: Seriously da, can you not sense it? This is it!

FATHER: [*Closing his eyes in feigned tiredness*] What is 'it'?

BILLY: *This is it!*

FATHER: But what is?

BILLY: This is it! Sure it was bound to happen.

FATHER: [*Sternly*] Have you got Sally pregnant!

BILLY: No, of course I haven't!

[*MOTHER enters, carrying two meals to the table.*]

BILLY: I'll tell you what I mean by 'it'.

MOTHER: [*Not really paying full attention*] 'It', son? What's 'it'?

[*FATHER shakes his head and covers his face with his hands.*]

MOTHER: [*In the same half-attentiveness, as she fusses over the table*] Not feeling well?

FATHER: No! I'm ailin' rapidly!

[*MOTHER departs, with only a cursory glance at FATHER. BILLY sits down at the table but does not touch his food.*]

BILLY: [*Earnestly*] Look, da. For months now there's been a killing almost every day. Bradford's murder was the last straw! This country's heading for a final showdown!

FATHER: But . . .

BILLY: You'll see tomorrow night! Wait'll you see the Third Force out in strength in Newtownards. It's on, da! This time it's in deadly earnest!

[FATHER goes to take a forkful of food, then, understanding dawning, he looks over at the holdall, then at his son.]

FATHER: Is that where you're off to?

BILLY: [*Firmly, with an obvious sense of pride*] Yes, da. I'm gonna be there!

[MOTHER returns with her own meal and sits down.]

MOTHER: *Where* are you off to then, Billy?

BILLY: Newtownards, ma.

MOTHER: What for, son?

FATHER: 'Cause the Big Man's holding a rally there.

MOTHER: You going to watch it?

BILLY: No, ma, I'm going to be in it! [*Then, with determination*] I'm joining the Third Force!

MOTHER: But, for why, Billy? [*Then, to her husband*] Could you not put the paper away for just once when we're sitting down to a meal?

[FATHER sighs in resignation and folds up the newspaper.]

BILLY: Ulster has taken enough from the IRA. All the killings, the bombings – it just goes on and on. There has to be an end to it! 'Cause, if we don't put a stop to it, Ulster will be destroyed.

FATHER: That's what the IRA want.

BILLY: Well, it's not what *we* want, so why do we let them get away with it! Somebody has to stop them!

FATHER: Billy, the police and the Army are . . .

BILLY: . . . are just piddling about like toy soldiers! Their hands are tied behind their backs! Anyway, I don't think Britain even wants to stop it – she doesn't give a damn about us! No – the only ones who can defend Ulster are Ulstermen!

FATHER: But Billy, the . . .

BILLY: The real fight is now on! It's high time that . . . [*Jumps up*] Where're all last weeks 'Teles', ma?

MOTHER: I dunno, son . . . ah . . .

[*BILLY paces around the room, searching.*]

MOTHER: You dinner's going to get cold. What do you want them for, anyway?

[*BILLY comes back and stands beside the table.*]

BILLY: Da, you're not sittin' on them, are you?

FATHER: [*In exasperation*] No, I'm not! Will you sit down and ate your dinner!

BILLY: [*Pacing again*] No, I must find them. Wanna read you something. [*He finally sees the bundle of papers at right of stage. He kneels beside them*] Now, what day was it? [*Out loud*] Da – what night was the match?

FATHER: [*Shaking his head*] Wednesday! Would you not sit. . .

BILLY: Then it must have been Tuesday? Tuesday . . . Tuesday . . . here it is.

[*BILLY carries the newspaper to centre of stage and searches through it.*

FATHER indicates to MOTHER to continue eating.]

BILLY: Listen. Here's what he said.

FATHER: Who? The Big Man?

BILLY: The Rev. William McCrea. Now, listen! [*He reads with great import*] "We owe it to our children, even if we have to die, to fight the rebels with a Holy determination and never to sheathe the sword until victory is won." [*He pauses for effect and stares at his parents*] **This – is – it!** [*He goes back to the table and commences eating*]

[*MOTHER and FATHER glance at each other. They too resume eating, but it is obvious that MOTHER is worried.*]

MOTHER: Are you staying overnight with friends, Billy?

BILLY: Friends? Where?

MOTHER: In Newtownards.

BILLY: [*Puzzled*] Ah, no – why?

MOTHER: [*Indicating the holdall*] Your spare clothes an' all?

BILLY: I don't know where I could be sent, or for how long?

FATHER: [*Taken aback*] Sent! What do you mean?

BILLY: Listen, da, the Third Force wasn't formed just to march up and down! We have a job to do!

MOTHER: [*Alarmed*] Billy, what are you talking about! [*Then, to FATHER*] John, what is this all about!

FATHER: [*Rubbing his head tiredly*] Billy, look – you're young, idealistic. . .

BILLY: [*Firmly*] I'm going to fight!

FATHER: [*Shakes his head negatively*] No, Billy, you . . .

BILLY: [*Angrily*] You think I can't! Think I'm a coward!

FATHER: No, Billy, I'm not thinking that at all. I know you would fight. But you see all these great leaders of ours . . . [*Falters, defeatedly*] See this country . . . ah, I dunno, I dunno.

BILLY: Look, don't get me wrong. I will fight, but I'm not a fighter – understand? The last thing I ever thought I'd be wanting to do would be to hurt anybody, let alone seek them out to kill them. But I can't stand back from it any more, watching it all happen, day after day. Every time you turn on the bloody TV you see the faces of bereaved children clutching their mothers' hands at the endless funerals. Those bastards must be stopped! Now!

FATHER: [*Quietly*] No side here is without guilt, son.

BILLY: I know, I know! The Prods have done some terrible things. Horrible things. But every so often we stop – for months you'll hear of nothing but IRA killings. We stop, but they just go on . . . and on . . . and on. Anyway, they want retaliation from us so they can justify their 'armed struggle'. Okay, they may have been the underdogs, but not to the extent that would justify all their murdering. [*Then, firmly*] I don't think it's *what* the Protestants may have done to them that upsets them – it's the fact that we're in the bloody country in the first place! The Prods could be bloody angels and they'd still be tryin' to push us out!

FATHER: Billy – I agree with everything you're saying. But what can you do about it all?

BILLY: I won't know that until I try, will I?

FATHER: But you don't know the first thing about . . . fighting. You're not trained for things like that.

BILLY: I may not have any training, but I've got this real anger inside me. It'll make up for it.

FATHER: Billy, let me tell you something. You may have a righteous anger inside, but some of the people marching alongside you will have a hatred, a bitterness. Hatred clouds people's judgement – makes them dangerous, even to their own side. You don't know what you could be getting mixed up in.

MOTHER: I don't like all this talk of fighting, you two. It scares me. I wish you . . .

BILLY: Da, you must've been about my age when you fought in the War?

FATHER: Hum, I must've been, yes.

BILLY: Well, you thought you were serving your country, didn't you? You felt you had to defend what you believed in?

FATHER: Yes, but . . .

BILLY: 'But' what!

FATHER: [*Wearily*] Ah, dear. Ah, dear.

MOTHER: Billy, I don't want you to go tomorrow.

BILLY: I'm going, ma.

MOTHER: Billy, I . . .

BILLY: Don't try to stop me!

MOTHER: But son, there could be trouble . . .

BILLY: There's been trouble every day for the last twelve years!

MOTHER: But there's no need for you to get involved in it . . .

BILLY: [*Fiercely*] I am involved – I live in the middle of it, don't I! We're all involved in it! It's right there in front of us every bleedin' day. I'm going – and I don't know when I'll be back. If fighting begins, and they're searching out the IRA, they could send me anywhere . . .

MOTHER: [*Struggling to think of some argument*] But . . . but . . . Tuesday you have to sign on.

BILLY: [*Momentarily confused by this reminder*] Well, I . . . I . . .

FATHER: You see, Billy, it's not so simple, is it? Despite the killings, life has to go on, people have to go to their work, have to . . .

BILLY: [*Angrily*] That shows you how bloody stupid it all is! The country's bleeding to death, and nobody seems to notice! Doesn't matter how many get killed, as long as the friggin' milk's on the doorstep every morning everything's supposed to be alright! Bloody Hell! [*Jumps to his feet.*] I'm going out for a walk – I need some fresh air!

[*MOTHER goes to say something but FATHER stops her. BILLY exits.*]

MOTHER: Can't you stop him going, John?

FATHER: I could try alright, but I wouldn't succeed.

MOTHER: [*Hopefully*] He'll change his mind, won't he?

FATHER: I don't think so, I don't think so.

MOTHER: But why not?

FATHER: 'Cause I know how he feels. Look, I feel just as frustrated and helpless as he does. At times even I feel something drastic must be done. But I can find excuses for doing nothing. Plenty of excuses. Most times I feel too tired to even care about excuses. It's so easy now to close the door and hope it'll all go away.

MOTHER: Could we get Sally to talk him out of it?

FATHER: [*Shaking his head*] No, Lily, Billy isn't interested in excuses – he's too angry. [*Muses a moment*] But maybe it's better he does go tomorrow.

MOTHER: John, you can't mean that!

FATHER: Oh, I do. Don't worry, he'll be okay. He just has to learn something about this country. At the moment he's reacting to its history because he doesn't really understand it. But he'll get a lesson tomorrow. And if not tomorrow, then very soon afterwards. Yes – a lot of people will get their eyes opened soon.

MOTHER: [*Sadly*] It's terrible the way this country's going. Just terrible. When we were having the kids, we could never have imagined it would all turn out like this. [*Pause*] I had such dreams for them all, such hopes. And they've all been shattered. You know, sometimes I lie at night wondering how many other mothers are lying awake like me, saddened by the stupidity of it all, fearful for what the future holds for their children. And I mean mothers on *both* sides. [*Another pause*] Where is it all going to end? Where?

[*MOTHER sighs deeply and rises to her feet, busying herself gathering up all the plates. She lifts them in a pile and exits. FATHER leans back in his*

chair for a moment, then picks up his newspaper. He tries to concentrate on reading for about ten seconds but shakes his head, throws the paper onto the table and just stares in front. Finally he too rises and exits the stage.]

Scene 2

Date: Monday, 23 November 1981, early evening

Setting: Inside a 'pub' in Newtownards

[BERT, the barman, enters. He goes behind the bar counter and we hear glasses clinking. He cleans the bar top. After some moments ALAN and DAVE enter.]

BERT: Well, here's the boozers comin' in now.

DAVE: It's your friggin' wages comin in, you mean!

[The two men sit down at the table.]

BERT: What's it to be?

DAVE: The usual.

[ALAN offers DAVE a cigarette and lights up one himself. BERT pulls two pints.]

BERT: Quite a crowd gathering out there.

ALAN: Aye, the circus is in town alright.

DAVE: I'm surprised there aren't more in here.

ALAN: All too bloody noseey. Out gawkin'. They'll be in later on. Then we'll hear all the rousing words. All the Loyal heroes and how they're goin' to move mountains.

[TOMMY enters, looking slightly tipsy]

DAVE: Speak of the Devil. Here's Tommy.

TOMMY: Huh, just thought you two'd be in here. Not going out to watch the men, eh? The *real* Ulstermen. The 'do-ers' – not wafflers like you two. Pull me a pint, Bert.

DAVE: Ach, we might nip out later. Thought we'd give the speeches a miss.

TOMMY: Huh, 'fraid they might shame you, eh?

ALAN: You jokin'! I bet I could tell you word for word what the Big Man and his lieutenants are going to say.

TOMMY: [*Sarcastically*] But then you're such a smart-arse, aren't you! Newtownards is packed with men who'll show the fuckin' IRA a thing or two!

ALAN: If you're so eager to be breakin'-in your new kickin' boots, why aren't you out there?

TOMMY: I like to get topped up, no matter what I'm at.

DAVE: Like last Saturday?

TOMMY: [*Dismissively*] Ach, that was nothin'. How come you know about it?

DAVE: Word travels, you know. You didn't think word of a punch-up in Belfast would get through to Newtownards?

TOMMY: It was just a 'friendly' disagreement.

ALAN: What took you to Belfast, then? Not your normal kickin' grounds?

TOMMY: I up for the big match. Wasn't it magic – real magic! I knew we could get into the World Cup. Nothin'll stop us now! That Israeli keeper must've thought the A-rabs had landed when big Gerry put that one past him. [*He goes to centre of stage, to energetically replay the action.*] One of the Israelis fouled Brotherston, no doubt at all – a free kick. But Noel runs over the ball, leavin' it for Jimmy Nicholl, who floats it high into the goalmouth. Hamilton nods it down, and big Gerry Armstrong knocks it into the back of the net. It was real magic! Left foot and all!

BERT: Aye, we've a good team now alright. They play real well together.

ALAN: Hey Tommy, how do you feel about some of the team being RCs?

TOMMY: What're you gettin' at?

ALAN: Well, you're not exactly a 'Fenian-lover', are you?

TOMMY: Bloody sure I'm not! But they're all playing for Northern Ireland, aren't they?

DAVE: You mean, if there were things to unite us, you'd accept Catholics as equals, would you?

TOMMY: I'm not in here to friggin' philosophise!

DAVE: Of course, that would be askin' too much.

TOMMY: Get lost, smart-arse!

[BILLY and JAMES enter. BILLY is sporting a 'Third Force' armband. He doesn't come fully onto the stage.]

BERT: Evening, James.

JAMES: You got any sandwiches left, Bert?

BERT: I could rustle up something in a minute.

JAMES: Fine. [*Then, to BILLY*] I knew you'd get a bite here, lad. Come on in.

[*Everyone exchanges greetings with JAMES.*]

JAMES: What you got? Salad? Cheese?

BERT: I think there's only cheese left. One round?

JAMES: Aye, just for the lad here. I'm not long after me tea. But we'll take a drink first. [*To BILLY*] What're you having?

BILLY: Tennents, thanks.

JAMES: Pint for the lad, Bert. And a hot whisky for meself; not too warm out there. Well, gentlemen . . . this is Billy. He's come all the way from Belfast.

[*BERT sets up the drinks, then exits at rear. BILLY and JAMES sit down at the others' table.*]

DAVE: One of the marching men, eh? One of the Big Man's Army?

ALAN: [*Peering closely at the armband*] 'For God and Ulster'. Well, that's a slogan's been evoked manys the time. Doesn't seem to have gotten us anywhere – we're still like lost sheep.

TOMMY: Don't pay any attention to these two, Billy. Chicken-livered, that's them.

DAVE: [*Angrily*] Listen you, I've done my fair share of marching! And where did it get us!

TOMMY: Big deal. You've done more mouthin' than marchin'.

DAVE: You wanna step outside!

ALAN: Wise up, you two! [*Then, to BILLY*] Come up with a crowd?

BILLY: No, by myself.

ALAN: Many out there now?

BILLY: Seem to be thousands gathering.

[*Bert returns with the sandwiches. BILLY reaches into his pocket.*]

JAMES: It's on me.

BILLY: No, you bought the drink.

JAMES: Put it away.

ALAN: Do as he says, Billy – he's rollin' in it.

JAMES: I wish I was!

DAVE: Go on, away-a-that. Sure you shopkeepers are loaded. [*Winks at the others*]

JAMES: [*Defensively*] If you realised the overheads I have! All the bills I have coming in!

DAVE: My heart bleeds for you!

JAMES: I'm damn sure it doesn't! You fellas on the dole get it easy. Life of Riley, you lot.

DAVE: Listen – I'd be workin' if I could get any.

TOMMY: Sure you've no time to work. You're too busy footering around in the UDA, trying to look important.

[*For the past few seconds BILLY has been searching through his pockets, a puzzled look on his face.*]

ALAN: Lost something, Billy?

BILLY: No, no. Just thought I had a single quid on me. Can't remember breakin' it.

JAMES: Bus fare?

BILLY: No, I had that in change.

JAMES: As long as it wasn't a fiver, or a tenner.

DAVE: What's a 'tenner'? Never seen one of them.

JAMES: Oh, here we go. Working-class martyr. Downtrodden. Starved.

ALAN: I know where it went, Billy.

JAMES: *You* know?

ALAN: Sure. [*Pauses*]

JAMES: Well, tell us then.

ALAN: [*Leans over and touches BILLY's armband*] This badge of honour here.

BILLY: Dammit, you're right. I clean forgot about that.

ALAN: A pound a time, isn't that right? How many do they reckon will muster tonight?

TOMMY: They're expectin' ten thousand.

ALAN: There's ten thousand quid. Not bad, not to be sniffed at, eh? Maybe we're in the wrong game, Dave?

JAMES: Aren't you being a bit cynical? Billy has come here tonight to serve his country in what is perhaps its darkest hour. At least he's standing up to be counted.

ALAN: Look James, I'm not knockin' Billy, I'm just none too sure he'd be marchin' to serve his country's interests. If you ask me those marchers will only be servin' the interests of themuns on the platform.

DAVE: Haven't we seen it all before? Think of all the men 'inside' now. How many of them are politicians? Well? Not effin' one of them! Those ones on the platform do all the mouthin' – "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right!" – but *who* is it does the fightin'! Us! The ordinary Prods! That lot keep their noses clean. None of their families has to worry about gettin' a bloody mini-bus up to see them at visitin' times! Oh, no, they're too smart for that. But what really gets up my nose is that after havin' goaded us into action, they turn around and disown us! They don't wanna know us then!

ALAN: Nobody wants to know us, even the media. Every time something happens, who is it they get on the box to discuss it? Us? People from the Shankill? Or even the Falls? Not friggin' likely! It's the same bloody politicians they trot out every night. I'm sick lookin' at the lot of them, let alone havin' to listen to them!

DAVE: Especially when they keep repeatin' the same bloody things, month after month, year after year. Nothin'll ever change here if we leave politics to the politicians. That's the politics people should start talkin' about!

JAMES: Oh, aye – you lot go ahead and run them down. I'd hate to think what would have happened to Ulster if the likes of the Big Man hadn't been here to defend us.

TOMMY: [*Sounding drunk*] I agree! I support the Big Man all the way! The effin' Taigs would've taken over years ago if it weren't for him! Bloody Westminster would've sold us down the river long ago!

DAVE: And you think they still can't?

TOMMY: [*Aggressively*] The Big Man all the way! Long live the Third Force! To Hell with the IRA! To Hell with all those too chicken to march! [He sways close to BILLY and puts an arm on his shoulder.] Me and Billy's goin' out now to walk beside real men. Real Ulstermen! You comin' too, James, me oul' son?

JAMES: Well . . . I can't tonight, I'm . . .

TOMMY: You're with us, aren't you?

JAMES: [*Hurriedly*] I am, I am! I never said I wasn't, I . . .

TOMMY: [*Swaying*] Didn't you say this was our darkest hour! [*Leans on JAMES*]

JAMES: I did, I did! [*Looks uncomfortable and tries to dislodge TOMMY*]

I've . . . I've a lot on my plate tonight. I've . . . stock-taking to do . . .

TOMMY: You and your wee shop! You're hardly workin' in it tonight?

JAMES: No, but first thing in the morning.

TOMMY: But man, you mightn't need to worry about openin' your wee shop tomorrow!

JAMES: What're you talking about?

TOMMY: Don't think all those men out there are just gonna prance up and down! Tonight's the night! Once we feel our strength we're straight into sortin' out the fuckin' IRA! Isn't that so, Billy. [BILLY *nods in reply*. TOMMY *then leaps to his feet*] Must take a juke and see how things is gettin' on. [*He staggers to the door and looks off-stage*] God, it's swarmin' out there. Hey, did I see . . .

[TOMMY *peers out again and then begins to laugh uncontrollably*.]

BERT: Well – share the joke then.

TOMMY: [*Fighting back his mirth*] Dave, I thought the UDA weren't havin' anything to do with the Third Force.

DAVE: [*Surprised*] We aren't.

TOMMY: Then take a gander out there.

[DAVE *hurries to the door and stares 'outside'*.]

DAVE: I don't see what you – bloody Hell! Frank! Harry! Come 'ere! Friggin' come over 'ere, I tell you!

[DAVE *disappears, and the rest of cast glance at each other in bewilderment. After a few moments DAVE returns, scowling*.]

DAVE: Lost them in the bloody crowd!

ALAN: Lost who?

DAVE: My whole bloody platoon's out there, armbands an' all! Wait'll I friggin' see them!

TOMMY: You can't hold good men down, Davey-boy. Some men know when the hour has come! Are you ready, Billy? [*He downs the remainder of his drink*]

BERT: Ah, Tommy, before you go . . . [*Waits expectantly*]

TOMMY: [*Feigning ignorance*] Eh?

BERT: I know you don't think things will be the same tomorrow, but I bet my bills still come in as usual.

TOMMY: Here's your friggin' money. Just testin' you. [*Places it on the bar counter*] That's all you're bloody interested in, anyway. [*Puts an arm around JAMES*] Not comin', me oul' son?

JAMES: Nah.

TOMMY: [*Suspiciously*] Not turnin', are you.

JAMES: What?

TOMMY: Ditching the Big Man for Dave's lot?

JAMES: Not likely.

TOMMY: Then you just go back to your stock-takin'. That reminds me – I passed your wee shop last Saturday; it looked closed?

JAMES: [*Defensively*] I . . . I wasn't here.

TOMMY: Oh?

JAMES: No.

TOMMY: Where were yah?

JAMES: Well, me and the missus . . . we, ah . . . we went down to Dublin on one of those special 'weekenders' . . . [*There is a stunned silence. JAMES tries to look nonchalant*] It was quite cheap . . . it was . . . [*Falters*]

[*TOMMY is now bent double with laughter. Even DAVE and ALAN cannot hide their mirth.*]

TOMMY: Dublin! Some bloody Loyalist you are! Come on, Billy, let's leave this nest of turncoats. God love them! [*As he passes DAVE, he leans drunkenly close to his face*] Well, Dave, when the Third Force clears out the IRA all by

itself, people will look at you lot in the UDA and say: ‘Where the fuck were you!’

DAVE: [*Angrily*] Get stuffed!

TOMMY: Come on, Billy, let’s go. [*He leads BILLY to the door, then turns around.*] This night’ll go down in history, you’ll see. The Big Man said it’s now “a do or die situation”. This is it, lads! This is it!

[*TOMMY and BILLY depart. Everyone else stares after them. Lights fade.*]

Intermission

[*During the Intermission a video could be shown, depicting the Third Force gathering and marching at Newtownards, as well as some of the speechmaking.*]

Scene 3

Date: Late December 1981

Setting: The pub once again

[*The pub is adorned with Xmas bunting. BERT is busy behind the bar.*

[*ALAN, DAVE and TOMMY are at the table.*]

DAVE: Do you think the Russians will move in?

ALAN: Dunno. If marital law can’t stop all those strikes and protests, I reckon they will.

DAVE: Those miners are holding out bravely. Sealed themselves in the mine – wouldn’t fancy that at all. Something like ten dead so far.

TOMMY: If the Ruskies come in with tanks there’ll be far more than that dead – only nobody’ll ever hear about it.

ALAN: This General seems to be a tough nut. What’s this you call him?

DAVE: Yara–something. Hey, Bert – what’s yer man in charge of Poland called?

BERT: Ah . . . just can’t remember, lads.

TOMMY: You’d know his name alright if he owed you bloody money!

BERT: I can do without your lip tonight!

ALAN: Strange. For a while I thought 'Solidarity' was going to win out.

TOMMY: Sure nothin' free survives under bloody Communism.

ALAN: For once I agree with you. Communism has been a terrible distortion of Socialism.

TOMMY: Same bloody thing!

ALAN: Oh no, it's not! In no way!

[MAGGIE *enters, greetings are exchanged and she goes behind the bar to assist BERT.*]

TOMMY: Course it is. They're all bloody Reds. Once they're in power, that's the end of your freedom.

DAVE: You mean you'd be stopped from kickin' peoples' head in on a Saturday night? We couldn't have that – that would be unthinkable!

TOMMY: I'm being serious.

MAGGIE: [*Cynically*] That's not possible.

TOMMY: [*Ignoring her*] I'm tellin' yah, there'd have been no bloody Civil Rights marches allowed in Russia. No IRA funerals. Tanks would've gone in and – BANG! – all over. Hunger strikes would've made no impression on those boyos in the Kremlin.

DAVE: Is that how you think it should have been handled here?

TOMMY: Damn right, it is!

ALAN: But you can't have it both ways?

TOMMY: Why not? We must have freedom. But those who would try to destroy that freedom – like the IRA – should be crushed!

ALAN: It's not that simple.

BERT: Jaruzelski.

[*A brief silence falls. All at the table, puzzled, stare over at BERT*]

BERT: Jaruzelski. General Jaruzelski.

TOMMY: [*Addressing the others*] Who's your friend behind the bar? Is he a parrot? What else does he say?

BERT: A minute ago you bloody well asked me . . .

DAVE: Okay, Bert, okay. We'd just gone on a bit since.

TOMMY: He must owe you money after all.

BERT: Who?

TOMMY: Who? God! [*Puts his head down on the table in mock despair, then lifts it again*] Don't worry, Bert, it'll come to you in about five minutes.

BERT: [*Annoyed*] If that's the way. . . that's the last time I'll . . .

ALAN: Sorry, Bert, don't take offence.

TOMMY: Order another round – he'll recover then.

[*Just then BILLY enters*]

TOMMY: Over here, Billy!

BILLY: Hello again.

TOMMY: Youse all remember Billy, don't you?

DAVE: Of course – you were here last month for the Big Man's parade?

[*BILLY nods and sits down*]

ALAN: Bert, another round, and whatever Billy's drinkin'. Well, Billy, have you risen in the ranks since we last saw you? Not an Area Commander yet?

[*BERT begins to assemble the drinks order*]

TOMMY: Billy, if he pushes us too far, we'll sort him out later, okay?

BILLY: [*Smiles*] I'm not here looking for trouble.

DAVE: [*Laughing*] You were last time. I mean, you were so sure the 'hour had come'.

BILLY: [*Quietly*] I did. . . I really did.

TOMMY: Anyway, Billy, before you came in we had just decided to install a Communist dictatorship to crush the IRA.

DAVE: We were wondering how the Big Man would take it though. We weren't sure how the Martyrs' Memorial would look with a big Red flag flying over it.

[*MAGGIE delivers a round of drinks to the table. BILLY is seen giving her his order*]

ALAN: As long as it wasn't a Green one, it might be alright. You know, never mind Communist governments, I'm beginning to think that *all* governments are much the same. The greatest enemy of ordinary people anywhere is often their own government.

DAVE: Look at the way Britain treats us. After all our loyalty and the blood we shed in two wars, she doesn't want to know us. And what did we get for being so loyal, eh? Some of the worst living conditions in Europe. That's what annoys me so much about Catholics. They point out all the deprivation they've suffered. Life hasn't been a bed of roses for us! I can still remember our ones talk of the blood-money that had to change hands before you could get a job in the Yard. To be honest I'm a Labour man. It's the Republican threat that always made me support the Unionists. But I'd no love for them – especially the 'fur coat brigade'. I'd even support the Big Man before I'd trust that lot!

[*Just then JAMES and SAM enter*]

ALAN: Hi, James; hi, Sam. Come on over, the pair of you.

[*SAM makes his way to the table, but JAMES goes over to the bar counter*]

DAVE: [*Softly, but loud enough for JAMES to hear:*] You notice he didn't come over to the table before ordering, in case he had to buy a round.

JAMES: [*Defensively*] Aren't I buying Sam one!

[*As JAMES is collecting the drinks from MAGGIE, she hands him a pint as well*]

MAGGIE: James, would you take that over to Billy?

JAMES: Who? [*Stares at BILLY*] Why, it's young Billy, indeed.

[*As JAMES goes to carry the tray over to the table, BERT places a copy of the Belfast Telegraph on it as well*]

BERT: If Sam didn't get that the minute he came in here, he might just take his custom elsewhere. Isn't that right, Sam?

SAM: Too right. Have to catch up on all the news. [*Then, sarcastically*] Read about the great changes that *aren't* taking place in this country.

[*JAMES distributes the drinks and hands SAM the newspaper. SAM reads, now and then glancing at the others as they continue their conversation*]

JAMES: So, Billy – what brings you here again?

BILLY: I'd promised Tommy I'd look him up before Christmas.

MAGGIE: [*Banteringly*] Pity someone wouldn't *lock* him up before Christmas.

TOMMY: My, you're full of seasonal charity, I don't think.

DAVE: Tell us, Billy – you still in the Third Force?

BILLY: [*Subdued*] I guess not.

DAVE: Fall out with them?

BILLY: No, it wasn't that. Nothing happened to fall out over. I suppose that was the problem.

BERT: Why?

TOMMY: [*Looking over at the bar in surprise*] My God, he's still there! [BERT *shakes his head in disgust*]

BILLY: Well, when we'd marched to the centre of the town, the Big Man gave a . . . well, it was a stirring speech. I remember clearly what he said: "This is a solemn occasion. It is solemn because many of us here tonight will have to lay down our lives to give our children the freedom they deserve." [*Looks distant*] I can almost hear him speaking even now, it was so . . . well, it really got into you. The security forces are like a "chained dog", he said. "If that dog is not unchained, we will be the unchained dog! . . . The killing of the IRA is over as far as Ulster is concerned!" [*Falls silent*]

MAGGIE: And? [*She comes over to the table and sits down*]

BILLY: Nothing. During the speeches we were all tense, excited. I can tell you I felt a little nervous, not knowing what to expect. But after the parading was over, we just stood around. The Big Man was nowhere to be seen. I thought he was probably with some of his Commanders, planning. But I never saw him again. Then everyone sort of drifted off. I got a lift home. Well, I didn't go home . . . I went to a friend's in the Shankill. And we waited.

MAGGIE: Waited? For what?

BILLY: [*Looking embarrassed*] For a phone call.

JAMES: From whom?

BILLY: I dunno. From one of the Commanders, I suppose. Telling us when we were going to go into action.

ALAN: You'll have a long wait, Billy.

BILLY: I guess so.

ALAN: This whole country's going to have a long wait. Until people on both sides wake up to the stupidity of it all.

DAVE: But sure, anyway, you've an armband as a souvenir. Just be thankful the whole thing only cost you a quid.

BILLY: [*Quietly*] Six quid.

ALAN: Six!

BILLY: Aye, I put a fiver into a bucket that was passed around.

[ALAN and DAVE burst out laughing]

ALAN: [*Shaking his head*] One of the Big Man's 'six-pound-wars'.

DAVE: Tell me, Tommy: how did the Big Man's speech affect you?

TOMMY: I . . . ah . . .

DAVE: You 'ah' what?

TOMMY: Well, it was . . . as Billy said – stirring.

DAVE: [*Suddenly suspicious*] Billy – was Tommy with you?

BILLY: Ah . . . yes.

DAVE: All the time?

BILLY: [*Hesitantly*] Well . . . at the beginning.

MAGGIE: Don't tell us, we can guess. You nipped off to another pub, didn't you?

TOMMY: [*Defensively*] Well, it was friggin' cold! I hadn't come out with heavy enough clothes on. And wasn't it snowing that night?

DAVE: You're a bloody chancer! No two ways about it! Ulster is definitely safe in the hands of the likes of you!

TOMMY: [*Angrily*] When the time comes I'll bloody fight alright!

DAVE: But wasn't that the time?

TOMMY: How could it be! Sure all the speeches the week leadin' up to it were so bloody contradictory! One minute they're talkin' about 'exterminating' the IRA and warning the IRA that the Third Force wasn't 'politically restrained' – and the next they're reminding us that we're 'law-abiding' people. You can't bloody well have it both ways!

DAVE: You can surely.

TOMMY: You friggin' can't!

DAVE: You can have the politicians remaining law-abiding, and the prisons filled with those who went outside the law. Isn't that the score now? Only the politicians will disown the ones inside. I've seen it all before. I don't trust any of them any more.

JAMES: Strange really. Prods distrust each other as much as they distrust the other side. Maybe even more, in some cases.

ALAN: If only spreadin' confusion could be used as a weapon – it's the only thing we seem to be good at.

TOMMY: You'll not confuse the bleedin' Provies. They're not confused! They just stick their heads down and blatter on, regardless of the piles of dead, 'Irish' or 'Brits'.

JAMES: The Prods may be confused, but they'll still have to take us into account. One million people aren't gonna just jump into the Irish Sea just because we don't fit into the IRA's Gaelic Ireland.

[SAM has been shaking his head from side to side for the past minute. The others now look at him, expectantly. Deliberately and slowly he folds up his newspaper]

SAM: You're talking here as if we are two completely separate communities in Ulster. Republicans talk the same way.

TOMMY: Well, aren't we?

SAM: [*Pointing to his forehead*] Up *here* we are, but that's about all. Oh yes, I've just remembered: some of us attend different churches – those that bother to go.

ALAN: Come off it, Sam, there's more than that separates us.

SAM: You couldn't be more wrong. We have far more in common than you think. Both communities here come from ancient roots, roots that long predate the coming to Ireland of the Anglo-Normans, or the Vikings, or even the Celts. We're much older than all that.

TOMMY: Sam, you're talking about Ireland; our lot came from Scotland – we're quite separate peoples.

SAM: Quite separate, are we? When do you reckon 'our lot' came to Ireland then?

DAVE: During the Plantation of Ulster, obviously.

SAM: [*Shaking his head*] Have any of you ever looked out to sea from Donaghadee or thereabouts?

ALAN: Sure.

SAM: And what'd you see?

ALAN: Well, Scotland, of course.

SAM: And it's close enough for you to make out buildings, isn't it?

ALAN: On a clear day, yes.

SAM: And you think people on both sides of the water only noticed that closeness a few hundred years ago during the Plantation? So for thousands of years before that nobody felt intrigued enough to cross that narrow stretch of water?

DAVE: Alright, there was probably some toing and froing.

SAM: [*Laughs derisively*] Some! Let me tell you about some of that 'toing and froing'. For a start, the 'Scots' originally came from here.

TOMMY: Yer head's cut, Sam!

SAM: [*Firmly*] You want to hear me out or not?

ALAN: Fire away.

SAM: The Romans called the people in this part of Ireland the 'Scotti', and when some of these 'Scotti' migrated across the water they united with the local people to form what became known as 'Scotland'. They took the Gaelic language with them and it spread throughout the Highlands. But the links don't stop there. Even before the 'Plantation' the Irish chieftains imported thousands of Scottish mercenaries – the galloglass – to help them in their battles against the 'English'. They even crowned a Scotsman King of Ireland, because as far as the Irish chieftains were concerned the two peoples were one and the same. [*Sam looks around the gathering*] So whether you like it or not, and whether the Republicans like it or not, the peoples of Ireland and Scotland have a continuous, shared history – possibly even a shared kinship. Both communities in Ulster have a common inheritance, and an equal right to be here. Certainly we have done great wrongs to each other in the past but we must accept that what's done is done, and we should be looking to the future.

DAVE: But we look at the future differently: we want to be British and they want to be Irish.

SAM: Whether we are prepared to accept it or not, *we* have an Irish part to our heritage, and *they* have a British part to theirs. There's no escaping that reality, for any of us. We're a mixed people here: look at the 'Planter' surnames among Sinn Féin – like Adams and Morrison. [*Looking at Dave*] Or the Gaelic surnames among your crowd – Murphy, Doyle and Duddy. [*Smiles to himself*] And I'll tell you another thing: when you lot go on about defending the

‘heritage of your forefathers’, half your forefathers probably fought for King James!

TOMMY: [*Irritatedly*] This history lesson is all very well, but it doesn’t alter the main fact – the fuckin’ IRA are tryin’ to bomb us into the sea. So – how do we protect Ulster?

SAM: Defence alone won’t ‘protect’ Ulster.

TOMMY: Now you’re talkin’! We’ve got to attack! Go into the Republican areas and wipe the bastards out!

SAM: [*Shakes his head despairingly*] Wise up – I don’t mean that at all.

TOMMY: Then how!

SAM: Ulster can’t survive just by you lot defending it – but only when you act to *change* it. We’ve tolerated far too much here. The ordinary people of Ulster – all of them – have been treated like second-class citizens. Some of the worst housing conditions in Europe, the highest unemployment figures in the UK: you name it, we’ve suffered it, and put up with it.

DAVE: Look, Sam, I’ve never liked the set-up here, but if we were to attack it too much, we’d only be helping the IRA.

SAM: [*Dismissively*] Hah! On the contrary, the IRA thrives on our intransigence! If the Protestant working class began to change things here for the better, it would put the wind up not only the Unionists but the IRA too! It would totally undermine them. We could do more damage to the IRA if we showed we had a better vision of a new society than they could ever have. The British Army won’t defeat them. The RUC and UDR won’t defeat them. [*Looking at Dave*] Your lot won’t defeat them. But if we had that *new vision* we could defeat them and really build something better here.

DAVE: But what political programme could we come up with that might. . .

MAGGIE: Why do you men always talk in terms of ‘political programmes’? I’m sick hearin’ about all these ‘political programmes’!

DAVE: [*Irritatedly*] Maggie, would you just. . .

MAGGIE: [*Angrily*] Don’t you dare finish that sentence! You men just think you bleedin’ know it all, don’t youse! We women don’t get a word in edgeways! Well, let me tell youse a few things. See you lot – and the bloody Republicans – well, youse are all the bloody same! Youse are! The bloody same!

JAMES: Maggie, it's not like you to curse. . .

MAGGIE: Oh, I've cursed alright! I've been cursing for the last twelve years.

Okay, under my breath, sure; but I've cursed the lot of youse! You lot and your precious 'Ulster'; them and their precious 'United Ireland'! Oh aye, you men can get plastered in your bloody pubs and plan how youse'll all kill each other. But it's we women who do most of the suffering, and are left to pick up the pieces – we're the ones livin' in fear for our kids! [*She suddenly becomes quieter and her face looks pained, distant*] Like Betty's child. . . eighteen months old. . . imagine, only eighteen months old. In its pram too. [*Looks near tears*] 'Safe' in its pram – what safety was that! Well, tell me then, all you heroes! When you can't even leave a ba out in its pram without it being blown to bits, what's the point of it all! [*Looks increasingly distraught*]

ALAN: [*Putting his hand on her shoulder*] Take it easy, Maggie, take it easy.

MAGGIE: [*Angrily*] Don't touch me! You men haven't felt half of what's been happening in this country. You and your 'political programmes'! I don't need any 'political programme' to tell me I feel the same as some woman up the Falls who sits in dread of anything happening to her kids. I don't need any 'programme' to tell me what I want out of life, or that it's the same as what she wants. [*More emotional now*] And when youse do all friggin' wise up, and youse have all finally decided just what type of country we're goin' to get, let me tell you this – it'll be too late for Betty's child, 'cause the child's dead! [*Begins to cry*]

[*For some time all we hear is MAGGIE's sobbing. The men seem lost for words. Finally MAGGIE gets up and goes behind the bar. SAM too gets up and paces about for a moment, before stopping beside the table again*]

SAM: Maggie's got more sense than the rest of us put together. It's not just new 'policies' that's needed. We need to build a completely new society here. And that'll show us who the brave men really are – for a new society cannot be built unless it's done in co-operation with the Catholic working class.

TOMMY: There's no friggin' point in talkin' to them until we've crushed the IRA!

[*SAM shakes his head sadly.*]

TOMMY: Sure Catholics wouldn't want to talk to us anyway.

SAM: Are you brave enough to talk to them! Or maybe you wouldn't want to bother!

[SAM paces about again. As if he is even angry with the AUDIENCE he gesticulates at them]

SAM: And what about you lot! Any of you think it's high time we all got together? [If there are any positive responses from the audience he says:] Well, at least there's a few brave souls out there. [But if there is no response he says:] Isn't that typical – we'd all rather continue to kill each other than to talk to one another! Ach, is it worth it! [Goes over to the bar]

[There is a period of strained silence. Finally BILLY dons his scarf and rises]

BILLY: I think I'll head on back now. Maybe see youse again some time.

OTHERS: See yah, Billy – take care.

[BILLY exits. Lights fade.]

Scene 4

Place: Billy's house

[FATHER enters carrying newspaper and sits at table. A few seconds later MOTHER also enters. She too sits at table, darning socks. They sit in silence for some moments, then BILLY enters, doffing his scarf and coat.]

MOTHER: Hello, son. Did you get anything to eat?

BILLY: Aye.

[BILLY sits down at the table, looking somewhat subdued]

FATHER: Some post arrived for you just after you left this morning. [BILLY still looks distant] Did you hear me?

BILLY: Aye, da. Where is it?

FATHER: Over on the sideboard.

[BILLY rises lethargically and crosses the stage, returning with a large envelope. He opens it, takes out a bundle of forms and brochures and begins to browse]

MOTHER: What is it, son?

FATHER: Don't be so nosey.

MOTHER: I was just . . . well, it's not like it's a personal letter, is it?

BILLY: To save youse two any fightin', it's from the Australian High Commission.

FATHER: [*Putting down his paper, puzzled*] Australia?

BILLY: Aye.

[*MOTHER and FATHER look at each other*]

MOTHER: Why are they writin' to you?

BILLY: 'Cause I wrote to them. [*Another silence. Both parents stare at him*] I'm thinkin' of emigrating.

FATHER: Emigrating! Why!

BILLY: Do I really need to answer that? What's here for anybody? Well – tell me?

FATHER: It's bad, son, I know, but . . .

BILLY: It's bloody awful! Isn't it! There's no jobs gonna come my way in a month of Sundays.

MOTHER: Things could pick up. Sure on the TV yer man said. . .

BILLY: [*Impatiently*] The TV talks about England – not here! They might pick up across the water, but we'll not. Years after they've got on their feet again, we'll still be floundering! This country's in a real mess!

[*Another short silence. FATHER stares at BILLY intently*]

FATHER: Billy. [*BILLY looks up*] Son, you've been out of work some time now. Why did this idea just come up now?

BILLY: Dunno.

FATHER: You've never talked of Australia before.

BILLY: Suppose not. [*He looks completely disinterested*]

FATHER: What's buggin' you, Billy?

BILLY: Nothin'.

FATHER: I don't believe you.

BILLY: Suit yourself.

FATHER: [*Sighs*] Listen, son, I'm not lookin' an argument, but . . . recently you've been . . . very quiet . . . keepin' to yourself.

BILLY: There's no law against it, is there! [*Seeing his father's hurt face BILLY relents*] Sorry, da. I'm just . . . I've had it up to here with this place. I want out of it!

FATHER: This has all been building up with you since Newtownards, hasn't it?

BILLY: Nah, not really.

FATHER: I think it has.

BILLY: Well, maybe it has. Look, da – Ulster is lost! Despite all the big words and the heroic speeches, it's not going to fight to defend itself.

FATHER: Maybe people don't know any more just what they're defending?

BILLY: Well, they're not spendin' too many sleepless nights tryin' to find out!

MOTHER: I'd be really sad to see you go, Billy, but I suppose there really isn't anything here for you.

FATHER: Son, if you don't believe me when I say this, you'll find out when you fill in those forms, but – you'll not be able to emigrate either.

BILLY: We'll see about that.

FATHER: I'm tellin' you. There's no country nowadays standing with open arms to welcome any Tom, Dick or Harry. You've no trade, no apprenticeship, not even a consistent work record. They'll not even look at you. You can't escape this place, Billy.

BILLY: So, here I am – a loyal citizen of Ulster! And what has Ulster done for me? Brought me up as a nobody? Isn't that it!

MOTHER: Things might change, son.

BILLY: [*Bitterly*] Nothing changes here! Doesn't our bloody history prove it! Huh! An oul lad in the pub tonight was goin' on about a new society here. Hah! No way – no way.

FATHER: Wouldn't you like to see something new . . .

BILLY: Huh! Fat chance of it comin' about here. This place doesn't want to change. I've come to the conclusion that people here are happy the way things are; they enjoy takin' sides and yellin' at each other'; they're happy with all their wee bigotries. If they'd wanted to change, they'd have started long ago. No, it's not on – this place is lost.

FATHER: And you'll not escape it, Billy. [*Musing*] Funny, isn't it: it's the ordinary people who bear the brunt of it all, and it's them who can't escape it. No, people will only get the Ulster they want. And whatever that is, we'll all have to accept it. This is your country, son; this is your future. This is it, Billy – *this is it*.

(Curtain)