

To the audience

I've noticed over the last few days that speakers have been referring to the 'ordinary person' as the person we are all trying to see right in the troubled Ireland of today. This appears to imply that there are extraordinary people who are going to carry out this mission. In an effort to balance things I will for the next 6 minutes pose as an ordinary person - even though it may be difficult for you to see me in this way.

Looking back at Ireland from the vantage point of the Middle East I find myself thinking of the pint of Harp and the way she might look at you as well as diving into taxis and attending meetings. A constant question I am being asked is - where are you from? Answering truthfully I say I am from Ireland - I have no reason to deny it - and their eyes light up and talk about the wonders of our landscape and the greenness of our grass - when you are in a desert our green is iridescent. They will usually add 'so you are Irish' and again I would admit it saying 'yes I am Irish'. 'Oh the Irish, you are so friendly, so kind, so nice and so the conversation would move on.

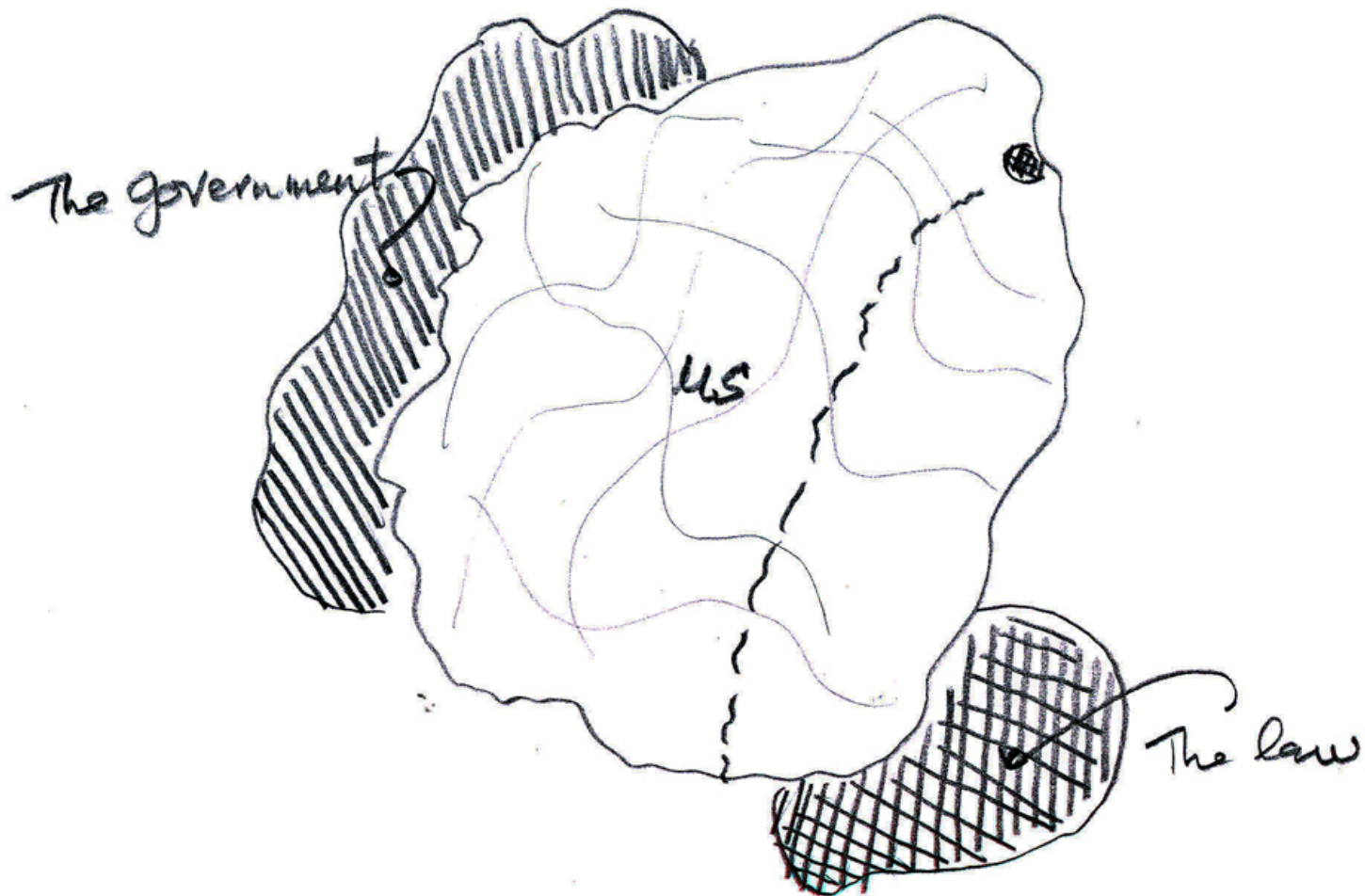
After a while I gave up trying to put them right on this perception and was happy to accompany them on this rose tinted ride. Coming back to Ireland and I was only away for three weeks this time I could see disillusionment all round me, a feeling of disbelief that we had lost the one chance we had at being great and the frightening reality that we had thrown all our toys out of the pram and there was no one there to pick them up. Anguish at a lost opportunity seemed set to change our kindly, caring nature as well as impoverishing us as a nation.

Fortunately, one day I happened to be in a Deli and at the counter I order a coffee and also spotted two buns sitting on a glass shelf. While the woman was waiting for me to make a choice, a sudden moment of indecision came over me and I just couldn't make up my mind. So I said to the girl, who was quite good looking actually, what do you think - which one would you choose. The response came back to me quick as a bullet, 'It's up to you'. Another moment came over me, this time one of great clarity. Suddenly I knew why Irish people are regarded as so friendly, nice, kind all over the world. We would never say 'it's up to you'. Our strength is we empathise, our nature is we want to get on board in the bun dilemma. We would say maybe 'I had one of those this morning at my break and it was lovely - I like currents though'. With this support and the critical information about currents I eased myself over the line of indecision.

After rediscovering our strengths what are our weaknesses. Well, we argue way too much and this leads to a very slow rate of decision making, sometimes it seems we are psychologically incapable of deciding. Decisions don't improve with age and ideas go off the boil. So in an effort to stay in touch to get closer to the mechanics of decisions and also to debate the current issues of the day I joined a political party. This was some years ago now and I can say if it's debate, discussion or insight into our government process you are looking for, a political party is the last place to find it. The party system dictates that discussion are nominated and earmarked and ideas are ring fenced to an inner cabal - political gatherings are infested by people climbing ladders both young and old in their personal bid for recognition. Just as well I have only an amateur interest.

In an effort to say something relevant on the subject of The Republic, and as an architect, naturally I have drawn a diagram which shows the various warring factions in our society - the government, the law and us the ordinary. This is not an idea or a solution but an illustration of the way I see us at the moment. The government and the law are represented as extrusions bolted on to the side of the body politic in a manner which suggests a sinister medical condition. The center ground is held by us, thrashing around wondering what hit us and at the moment not seeing the solution that is there but just round the corner out of sight. Sooner or later we will get up off our knees and look for the solutions within and yes we will save ourselves despite the government and the law. It is a matter of 'seizing the time' - Bobby Seale '68.

Paul Q



Perception Diagram - Two institutions bolted on to the side of US.

