

Reflections on 1969
Lived Experiences & Living History

(Discussion 1)

1969: How do we begin to recall that period?

compiled by

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The Fellowship of Messines Association

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Introduction

The Fellowship of Messines Association was formed in May 2002 by a diverse group of individuals from Loyalist, Republican and other backgrounds, united in their realisation of the need to confront sectarianism in our society as a necessary means of realistic peace-building. The project also engages young people and new citizens on themes of citizenship and cultural and political identity.

Among the different programmes initiated by the Messines Project was a series of discussions entitled *Reflections on 1969, Lived Experiences & Living History*. These discussions were viewed as an opportunity for people to engage positively and constructively with each other in assisting the long overdue and necessary process of separating actual history from some of the myths that have proliferated in communities over the years. It was felt important that current and future generations should hear, and have access to, the testimonies and the reflections of former protagonists while these opportunities still exist. Access to such evidence would hopefully enable younger generations to evaluate for themselves the factuality of events, as opposed to some of the folklore that passes for history in contemporary society.

This *first* discussion was held in the Irish Congress of Trade Unions premises in Donegall Street, Belfast, on 31 August 2019. It was chaired by **Deirdre Mac Bride**, and two panellists – **Padraig Yeates** and **Jim McDermott** – each gave a brief presentation before the discussion was opened up to the thirty individuals present. These individuals represented a wide diversity of political backgrounds and allegiances, and most of them had either been participants in the events under discussion, or witnesses to them.

The theme of this first discussion was ‘*1969: How do we begin to recall that period?*’ Of necessity the wide-ranging discussion which ensued was edited slightly to fit into the space available in this pamphlet.

Harry Donaghy *Co-ordinator*, The Fellowship of Messines Association

1969: How do we begin to recall that period?

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Welcome everyone. My name is Deirdre Mac Bride and I will be chairing this event today. But before we start Harry Donaghy was going to say a few words.

[**Harry Donaghy**] One of the earliest programmes we organised, back in 2009, was called *The Decade of Centenaries: Can we let the Past imprison our Future?* But a feature of all the conversations back then was: how are we going to handle things when we get to those anniversaries that *aren't* 'history' – in the way that the Somme, the Covenant, the Easter Rising, can be viewed as history. Because when we look at the 1969 period, we are not dealing with our grandfathers, or our great-grandfathers, it's much closer than that: it involves ourselves. Nevertheless, during the ongoing discussions that we held with a variety of people we realised that we have an opportunity now, maybe a unique one, of initiating meaningful conversations around those momentous events of 1969.

Of course, for today's young people that period *is* history, so that is why we invited some young people from Queen's University along today, not only to listen to our reflections on that period but to share their own thoughts with us. And, as always, we will strive to have thoughtful, measured exchanges, especially as this was a real lived experience for a lot of the people who are going to be taking part at different stages of this programme.

We have an opportunity now, maybe a unique one, of initiating meaningful conversations around those momentous events of 1969.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Thank you, Harry. I would like to introduce Pdraig Yeates and Jimmy McDermot who will speak for about ten to fifteen minutes each before we have a general discussion. First of all: Pdraig Yeates, a trade unionist, journalist, and distinguished social and labour historian. One of the books he is well known for is *Lockout*, which is about the 1913 strike in Dublin.

[**Pdraig Yeates**] Thanks, Deirdre. I wasn't here in '69, I was in England. But the events of '69 had a big impact on the Irish community there. I was a member of both Sinn Féin and Clann na hÉireann. And we organised a building strike. And we closed down quite a lot of building sites in Birmingham, because there

were about 100,000 Irish people who lived and worked there. We collected money, we collected other things, we tried to help in any way we could. I joined the republican movement in 1964 and I stayed in it, in one way or another, until some time in the 1980s. I didn't come to Belfast until '71.

What has interested me in recent years has been this legacy contest that has been going on, with politicians and other public figures taking lumps off each other, on either side of the community, and the very lucrative industry, as I see it, that has grown up around it, around the truth and justice issue – I appreciate that not everyone might agree with me. But it did strike me that one thing we have lost, and very soon are going to lose completely, is *any real information on what happened* between the beginning of the Troubles, say 1969 or a little earlier, and '76, which is basically when almost half of all the people who died or were injured, became casualties. And that's going to be gone soon. We all know people, including people sitting here around this table, who were involved in various things, or people whose memory has gone who are not able to give any information any more.

It did strike me that one thing we have lost, and very soon are going to lose completely, is any real information on what happened [at] the beginning of the Troubles.

So I discussed this with Harry and we came up with this idea of a Truth Recovery Process, and we have been trying to explore it ever since. I spoke to very senior legal people, North and South of the border, and all of them said that there is absolutely nothing to stop some process of amnesty, either total or conditional, in some way or other, if the governments had the political will to do it. And our hope is that some sort of process will be set up before it's too late, that would allow people to give information to families. And give information, if they want, on their own as to why they did things, without being sucked into the legal system. Because we all know that whatever else you get in courts, you very rarely get the truth, and even rarer it is to get justice, certainly from my personal experience. So that's basically how I got drawn into this.

I think we need to engage with other people in some sort of conversation, which would also hopefully develop a dialogue between our communities, and lay to rest some of the mythology that is propagated every day of the week. A couple of times walking up the Falls [Road] I pass tour groups being taken around by young people who weren't born in the early 70s, and who are telling

stories which are basically fairy stories. But what do you do? You can hardly start arguing with these young people in front of a crowd of strangers who are on holiday, maybe simply trying to learn something. But the fact that people are saying these things, and obviously believe it, worries me, for they are distorting their own understanding and the consciousness of their communities.

A couple of times walking up the Falls I pass tour groups being taken around by young people who weren't born in the early 70s, and who are telling stories which are basically fairy stories.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Can I now introduce Jimmy McDermott, who is an author and an educationalist. He taught at St Thomas' and Corpus Christi. And his book is *Northern Divisions: The Old IRA and the Belfast Pogroms 1920–22*.

[**Jim McDermott**] I haven't written anything since *Northern Divisions*, so thank you very much, Deirdre, for saying that I was an author! But I do think there is a problem when gathering people's memories, because when I came to write the book *Northern Divisions*, which dealt with the period between 1920 and 1922 in Belfast, I found it very difficult to access information about it, and yet the intervening period was quite short. We are dealing with a 50-year period now, of the anniversary of August 1969, and for anybody here who lived up until 1969 their experiences thereafter, the people they met, their points of view, how they viewed events, were radically altered by their experiences. In actual fact to try and comprehend what happened with any degree of accuracy will be incredibly difficult very soon. Take a look around us in this room, the amount of different points of view represented; imagine different experiences, the people they met, the empty chairs of people they remember, how their lives were radically altered, how social circles were narrowed, how outlets which hitherto before 1969 had been open to you seemed closed. It will have a withering effect upon memory.

And, furthermore, for often the very best of intentions and because of the consequences of their experiences, people got involved with organisations outside the law, and that's very understandable, and it meant that your memory would be also circumscribed. One of the difficulties I found, when writing about the 1920-22 period in Belfast, was that people were afraid to publicly put down what they did, what they remembered, because of a fear of the consequences. Consequences for their families, consequences for themselves. And often too they parked events. I taught for a long time, and I found that most human beings

are like the kids that I taught: they tend to select, even when they are very young, the best bits of what happens to them, and they leave out the inconvenient bits. Try and sort out two kids who have had a row in the playground. Ask each one separately which one started it: it's a recipe for a nervous breakdown! Kids will always put their own side of things first. And most people tend to do the same.

We need to try and comprehend what happened. Will all versions of what happened be the same? Absolutely not! Are there then some guiding principles, some core beliefs, some agreed agenda, surrounding the past that can be reached? I hope so. Because to fail to do so will mean that people will begin to think that it was all a jolly jaunt. The truth is also about the awkward, knobbly-wee bits in your past too. And they are often left out. And the danger I think is that generations coming through will grow up with the perception that there is some sort of glamour to be had in a repetition of the past, that 'this time' *our side* will win. People are entrenched enough as it is, but the process will be accelerated if people believe that the past, number one, is simple, and, two, that one side had a monopoly of good behaviour or bad behaviour. That is rarely the case in any war. I have yet to hear of a war in which one side were all totally heroes and the other side all totally villains. It is going to be difficult to get to the past, but *to fail to do so* is to live with legend. Depending on what books you read, what bars you drink in, and who you socialise with, the danger is that the legend you believe in will become your reality.

The peace process was hard won, and I would hate to see it lost through a lack of commonsense as to what had brought us to the awful mess, the debacle, that we lived through. Thank you.

I have yet to hear of a war in which one side were all totally heroes and the other side all totally villains. It is going to be difficult to get to the past, but to fail to do so is to live with legend.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Jim, thank you. I am struck by something Eamonn Mallie said, in the context of Brexit. He said that given how intemperate our politics are becoming, it was important that we had a discussion based on discretion and consideration, that we thought carefully about the language that we used. When we look at 1969 we are looking at a *lived* history, and we have all lived it at different ages, different places, and hopefully we can bring to this discussion our memories of why, as communities, the Troubles happened. And I personally feel

that part of that discussion has to be about repudiating violence in the future, because we don't want to go back. And on that note, maybe we'll now open it for discussion.

[**Billy McQuiston**] I think that there *should* be some form of truth recovery. But again, many of the people involved in our recent conflict are getting older, they're all dying off, so it is going to be harder the longer we go to get to the truth in any of these things. And the other problem is that some of the political parties want the truth to come out in their favour. The way Sinn Féin is going there were 3000 died of flu during the conflict, nobody died at all! So, I think we need to get it, and we need to get it right, before it all goes, basically.

Many of the people involved in our conflict are dying off, so it is going to be harder the longer we go to get to the truth. And, the other problem is that some of the political parties want the truth to come out in their favour.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] So time is important. We're also facing into the 50th anniversaries, or simply remembering year by year. You only have to think of what the consequences that would have for us as a society, and what we will be asking another generation to keep on remembering, and the impact of that.

[**Eamon McGonigle**] From a very young age I always felt that the Nationalist community was placed in a position of disadvantage in relation to the Unionist community. And that's why the Civil Rights movement came into force, and then the Troubles started. But *how* do we come out of it? I think that this is one of the best ways to do it – sitting talking, finding out what hurt each community gave to each other – and making sure we don't go back into it again.

[**Deirdre Hargey**] I was just thinking that sometimes we get ourselves into a position of thinking that we are somehow different in how we deal with conflict or remembrance than any other society. I was in Cyprus recently, I have been in Portugal... obviously looking at events in America, in terms of race and things that are emanating there, and they're grappling with their history as well, and we're seeing the impact of colonial rule across the globe. And so in some ways we're not much different than other parts of the world in trying to deal with all these issues.

I went out with Harry to Messines well over ten years ago, and one of the

memories for me was that after the First World War they obviously wanted to forget about what happened, they covered in all the trenches – all of the countries in Europe wanted to just move on. And yet – I think it could have been the 90th anniversary, or the 80th anniversary – but they then started *unearthing* the trenches; they were digging them out, they were starting to recreate them again because they were saying, as a society, and as countries, that *we can't forget*, that we have to learn from the past, we have to understand it.

Also, you can't negate either the role of social media now. You didn't have the internet thirty years ago, you had one pertaining narrative coming from public broadcasting, whether it was the BBC or others, or RTÉ in the 26-Counties. But the role of social media, Twitter and Facebook, and the dynamic that that adds in terms of our conflict as well, obviously is bringing it onto a new field that people are having to grapple with. Social media makes the world an even smaller place. We're a small place as it is, and I suppose our conflict at times is more difficult to deal with because most people know each other, or they will know a family member; but social media shrinks that down even again.

I'm in Council and when we were looking at the decade of centenaries we couldn't get full agreement on the 50th anniversaries because some were afraid of it. But there *were* principles which all six parties at that time, back in 2012, signed up to. One being that you look at all these events in their *widest* historical narrative: and that's not even the narratives of these two islands, there's a European narrative, and there's an international narrative as well, because there were other events that were happening that also had an impact in Ireland but also across these islands. And the fact that Belfast City Council, for the first time ever, agreed to host two events, to mark both the Somme and the 1916 Rising... I never thought I would have seen it, yet it happened. And there was an exhibition came out of it. I also think that the richness of that programme was that it didn't just look at key events, whether from a Unionist or Nationalist/Republican viewpoint, but started to also look at the issue of class, started to look at the issue of gender. Looking at what the Labour movement was doing, what the women's movement was doing, what were other social movements doing at that time... and that really starts to broaden, and I suppose stimulate, your own narrative or your own

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thoughts on things as well, and tempt you to widen your own outlook.

[Sean Murray] I think we've had some good discussions around how we handled, or how we marked, the various centenaries. But I think we're into a different process when we are talking about 50th anniversaries, because they are *living* memories, the pain is still there and we need to be more sensitive than we have been previously. There isn't a single narrative; I think the requirement is to listen to, and try and understand, *different* narratives. I have a republican perspective, but it is important that we are exposed to *all* the narratives. Especially that young people are exposed, and we debunk a lot of the myths that are out there at the present time. And if we can manage to agree on the facts in relation to what actually happened in certain situations, I think that would be a major step forward.

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In terms of legacy and how to deal with it. If we could facilitate an information recovery process... and I use the words *information* recovery process, I didn't talk about 'truth' recovery; I think we need to be realistic, we are not going to get the truth, and that's going to be from *all* the combatant groups. And it's also to agree the level of information you are going to get. Some people think that an information recovery process will mean people going in and naming names of people who done this or that – it's not going to happen, I need to be honest.

You also talk about legislation; there is no legislation around legacy. There's a draft bill that has been sitting there for two years, and I don't think it will ever be progressed, because I don't think the British government want to handle that issue, I think they're fearful of it. So, can we create an information recovery process with built-in guarantees that allows people to come forward with their information, so that they will not have to face the consequences of prosecution further down the road? I think that's possible. And that doesn't necessitate an amnesty, because an amnesty I think would allow the state forces... if you look at the stats: 25,000 republicans and loyalists went to jail, and served I don't know how many thousands of years in jail in relation to it; how many state forces went to prison in relation to what happened during the conflict? So that's the imbalance that happened in the past, and that's why there is a concern and fear around an

amnesty. Who will gain mostly from an amnesty?

So, can we create a situation whereby legislative processes are put in place which will guarantee that information coming forward will be free of prosecution, and I think that's where the focus should be. And the same for story-telling. There is a different process between an information recovery process – which is a sort of official, formal process – and an informal process, so that people can come forward and tell *their* story about what they seen or heard, what their lived experience was. And I agree, the focus should be that this should never ever happen again.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] It is interesting you should say the latter, for it seems to me that Eames-Bradley actually set out an awful lot of things that could happen just within civil society; things like story-telling, that are allowing people to say where they were or what happened to them.

[**Sean O'Hare**] I think when we give our personal views or stories of '69 we should go back further and also give our views *before* that, about when we were growing up, how we thought of the place we lived in, what we thought of the powers-that-be, etc. We have to remember that the Nationalist opposition in Stormont only put forward one Bill that was passed, and that was the Wild Birds Act, which nobody could be against. The attitude of the nationalist people by 1960 was not rebellious, it was that we're doing okay, we're getting Family Allowance, we're getting new houses from the Corporation... and the attitude was that of more or less acceptance of the status quo. Especially when O'Neill came to power, and, as people jokingly said, he promised to walk over us with carpet-slippers as opposed to the hobnail boots that had walked over us in the years before. And people said he's going to be more liberal – didn't he go up to St Dominics and all that – and people were more relaxed about things.

When we give our personal views of '69, we should also give our views before '69, about when we were growing up, how we thought of the place we lived in, what we thought of the powers-that-be, etc.

But the most important incident that undid all that was 1964, the Divis street flag incident. Once Paisley stepped in and insisted that the flag be taken down, and the police did his bidding, then younger nationalists began to think that it was Paisley rather than O'Neill who was the dominant factor. But once the flag

incident† happened, it caused riots, it brought thousands onto the streets, for the first time since 1930. The older people were saying “No, don’t start fighting with the police; you’ll bring things down to our doors, it’ll go back to like the 20s, you’ll be shot in your beds!”, and all this sort of thing. But the younger people had a different attitude entirely; they said “We’re not going to be walked on.” The crowd stood their ground, they faced the RUC and drove them back to Hastings Street barracks. That was the turning point, because the young people then knew that they could defeat the RUC and after that that’s when attitudes among young people, as far as I am concerned, changed, and changed entirely. And that was the lead-up from then to ’69. And at the same time, if Stormont in 1969 had had the political savvy, or even the generosity, to try and bring the nationalist population in, they might have changed things entirely.

[Deirdre Mac Bride] I suppose the question is: how do we frame this discussion in a way that keeps us safe as a society for the next twenty, thirty years? We need to find a way... especially given that there will be different stories, different narratives and different truths... we need somehow to find a way to say that in the telling of all of this, in the discussion of all of this, this is where we are heading as a society, and these are some of the values in this society which we will want to hold dear. And for me some of those values are about democracy and inclusion. Is that *your* sense? Or we are in danger of rehearsing the past... and the problem when we rehearse is that we become like hamsters caught in the wheel, and the danger is we pass that on to the next generation. We are now in a period when identity politics, internationally, are much stronger than they used to be. We’re all trying to find our own little bit of identity and hold on to it. And that makes partial stories and partial truths much more dangerous.

[Matthew Bell] Whenever I hear talk of the dangers created by Brexit – and the implied risk to the Good Friday Agreement – I can agree with what is being said here. There is still a lot of pain here, in people’s stories. I know guys my age and younger who are still quite passionate about things. It hasn’t gone away, and I am

† When, in September 1964, during the run-up to a British General Election, an Irish Tricolour was displayed in the Divis Street headquarters of the Republican Party in West Belfast, Rev. Ian Paisley, leader of the Free Presbyterian Church, threatened to remove it if the authorities did not. On the 28th, when the RUC, armed with sten-guns, revolvers, riot-batons and shields, went to seize the flag they were confronted by a crowd of more than 2,000 people. After the police had smashed down the doors of the headquarters with pickaxes and taken possession of the flag, violence erupted. Severe rioting continued for another three nights.

very scared, especially as this is something that can reignite people's passions, and can remind them: oh, *we* can do something about this, we can go back. Because we know the stories of people who try to romanticise the Troubles to a new generation, so I share your concerns as well, that that is a possibility.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] And when you think of that, what do you think that we need to bear in mind? For instance, a friend of mine said to me: I don't encourage people to talk about the Troubles in a humorous way, I don't want my children to think it was in any way funny – it wasn't funny.

[**Matthew Bell**] That's a very difficult question, because it is very emotive for people. I think that the thing which affected me mostly about the Troubles was the tragedy of it all, the lives that were lost. I remember talking to one individual and he said that a lot of people lost their lives, and it wasn't worth *one*. The loss was terrible for our society and that isn't something we want to go back to. And I wouldn't like to see it glorified for there are some times that I have heard people glorify it a bit, and I would be very concerned about that stuff, especially nowadays with young people.

[**Peter Black**] We talk about the conflict, but what *was* the conflict? Because all I can see is workers killing workers. I don't know why we call it *the* conflict. Was it the state getting the workers to fight among each other so that they can just carry on? So, could somebody explain to me what the conflict was, other than a sectarian bloodbath, because that's how I see it. I don't understand what the conflict was. I am an Irish Republican and proud of it, but did 3000 people dying help in any way towards an Irish Republic?

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[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Can I be controversial and suggest that the conflict is our tendency in this society to reach for violent methods for solving our problems, and of refusing to compromise with each other.

[**Sean O'Hare**] To strip it all down to the basics, the conflict is about the land we are sitting on – who owns it? What we have to do is separate land from nationality. We are going to have to bring about a situation where you can have your nationality, and that in this land that you live in you have the full rights of

your British or Irish nationality, and it is entirely separated from land. No matter how many meetings we all go to together, when we leave both sides still say: oh, this is *our* country. That's the crux of the matter, to separate nationality from land. And also, when giving our views about what we done during this so-called conflict, it's alright to say this or that happened and I was forced to do it because this is what my community was doing. But you also have to finish it off by saying that lots of things that I done was wrong. And that's the hardest bit to say. We all have to say that some of the stuff we done was wrong.

When [telling] what we done during this so-called conflict... you also have to finish it off by saying that lots of things that I done was wrong. And that's the hardest bit to say.

[Deirdre Mac Bride] And I would say that we should also say that some of the things I *thought* were wrong, because there was lots of silent support.

[Billy McQuiston] One of the things that came out of the Messines project for me was learning a different narrative. I was brought up on my granny's knee and she was telling me that while the Sons of Ulster were marching off to fight in the First World War republicans back-stabbed us. And in the Second World War that the Republic actually lit their lights in an arrow shape to guide the German bombers to Belfast. I mean, that's the stories I was brought up on. Then, through the Messines project, I learned that there was actually four times more Irishmen than Ulstermen died in the First World War, and the same in the Second World War. So, when I learned that, then you start questioning every other thing that you've heard. When you cause a bit of doubt on one thing then it makes you think more about everything.

[Andy Hart] I think, Billy, that's important. It is alright as men of a certain age sitting around and swapping war stories of our own war. And thinking that this whole thing will go away with this generation. It *won't* go away with this generation. The young people that are being arrested for things that are ongoing today, connected with what is left of this thing we call the Troubles, are not our age; they're in their twenties and thirties. So the torch has been passed, and it is being allowed to pass, because communities are still segregated and are being brought up on those old false myths. And it is not helped by a legacy process that has been weaponised by political parties, who are not interested in finding a solution that will bring any comfort to victims, because if they do

that, then that is that particular weapon decommissioned, and is no longer something that they can take into the political arena. Regarding a Truth process – and I do get what you say, Sean, that the likelihood of the truth coming out is perhaps unlikely – but at least it allows us to take that fight out of a political arena where the only people who are benefiting from it are the lawyers.

[**Sean McGuigan**] I don't think we can ever have a resolution to the conflict until the two governments, the Irish government and the British government, tell the truth. Because a lot of this conflict was manipulated from offices in MI5 headquarters and Dublin Castle. Civil servants were moving bits of paper about ... we need to do this, we need to do that... and people in the North here lost their lives. And it didn't need to happen. So the governments both need to come clean and tell the truth; it can never end until they tell the truth. Republicans were used by the British government, Loyalists were used by the British government, Republicans were used by the Free State government, and we are still being used by both sides. And it can't end until the governments tell the truth about their role in all of this.

Republicans and Loyalists were used by the British government, Republicans were used by the Free State government. And it can't end until the governments tell the truth about their role in all of this.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] If it can't end what do we do? We still have to move on.

[**Sean McGuigan**] I think it will keep rumbling. At the moment it is rumbling below the surface, it's what [British Home Secretary] Maudling once called 'an acceptable level of violence', and it will continue like that, until the governments step up and accept the responsibility that they hold for the loss of three and a half thousand lives in the North here. And to me the governments are responsible for the vast majority of those lives.

[**Paddy Mackel**] It just strikes me that part of these issues are about facing the reality of what created the difficulties here. And to me it was another demonstration of colonisation by major Imperialist powers, that's where it comes from. And I think part of the issue we're facing here is that we've been left with a partial-colony, in an island with two identities. And until we come to terms with how to embrace and welcome both of those identities we will repeat this. I think that's the issue for me. Because we can all have our own narratives. The idea

for me is not the romanticisation of this issue, it is actually the *justification* of what you did. I think that's where the difficulty is, because you can actually dispel romantic views of what happened in the past. It is more difficult when somebody stands up and says: "Here's what I did, and here's why I did it – and I was right." And that's the difficulty because there are two narratives as to why you were right, or why you were wrong. And, to be honest, to just have the protagonists sitting here saying what they did – whether Republicans or Loyalists – without looking at the state forces, is a waste of time. To contextualise this, you have to do it in the context of what the British government have done right across the world, and not just in Ireland. And I think that's where the lessons need to be learned. So, somebody taking up a gun on the Falls Road or the Shankill Road, or in Derry or in Newry, for me is a very small part of a bigger picture. And until we look at it in that bigger picture context, we will repeat the past.

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[**Martin Connolly**] I just want to make a different point. Language is important in this whole thing, trust is important. If you think back fifty years ago, you had the Civil Rights Movement, and the Unionist establishment then were very fearful of that; it posed a threat, apparently, to the existence of the state, and they came down on it like a ton of bricks. Trust obviously shattered then with the nationalist community. Remember there were Liberal Unionists, Young Unionists, in the Civil Rights Movement. And you can kind of draw a parallel with what is happening here today, with the whole 'backstop' issue, with again the DUP, the majority Unionist Party, who in my view are whipping up fear and hysteria about that issue, and the change and tone in language that they're using – 'anti-democratic backstop', 'carving up Northern Ireland from the Union', and all that stuff. I mean they are going so far away from the trust that was embodied in the Good Friday Agreement it is in danger of just shattering the whole process.

[**Matthew Bell**] There is a bigger picture. We were talking in our social work class about victims of the Troubles and we were able to talk first-hand to people who had suffered really debilitating injuries, And during that discussion we discovered that the vast majority of people who had been affected by the

Troubles weren't the combatants from either side, they were civilians just going about their everyday lives. And I think that is something that has to be addressed as well, that it wasn't just two sides fighting each other, there was a mass of people just caught in the crossfire.

[**Eamonn Lynch**] I think one of the reasons we look at the past is to try and understand it and not to repeat the mistakes of the past. To go into a campaign which David Ervine called 'a sordid sectarian squabble', for the guts of forty years, and now people are asking: what did we gain? Looking back to the IRA in 1969: There was practically no-one in it; there were three people in the Markets. there were six in North Queen Street. The republican programme then was to get people in, to analyse things in depth, *not* to start another campaign, but to look upon the struggle as a class struggle, and bring Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter together. You are never going to do that by beating them up, or shooting them, or putting bombs in cars or whatever; you are never, ever going to do that.

And it was obvious when I was a delegate to the 1970 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis that there was going to be a split. There already was a split, and by people who weren't part of those earlier discussions, these were people who came flooding back to the movement. People like Joe Cahill. I remember Billy McMillan saying to me: "I approached Joe and asked him if he was coming back [after he left prison]" and he said, "Ack, I think I'll leave it to the young fellas now." So Billy McKee and others hadn't been part of the education process. Don't get me wrong, they were decent men, but for me they were men of a certain time, and their only method, down through the years, was the Thompson gun – everything had to be answered with force, everything. Sinn Féin always took a back seat. But these people, they were going to be the Republican paratroopers, if you like. And that seemed to be the only answer they always had. In 1969, for example, the UDA wasn't even in existence. The UVF was a very small group. The UDA didn't come on-stream until 1971, so the actions of the Provisional IRA brought out all these people, and you had this sectarian tit-for-tat. It has only been in recent years that Sinn Féin has come on as a more predominant force.

They were decent men, but for me they were men of a certain time, and their only method, down through the years, was the Thompson gun – everything had to be answered with force.

And moving forward, I would love to see the Good Friday Agreement

tweaked. Is it twenty years old now? You have to look at it and ask: is it fit for purpose? Can a party really turn round and say: we wanted rubber handles on the bins, and that didn't happen, so we're walking out! If a party wants to walk out then let the other people take the reins. Stop the salaries of the people walking out, of course – should it be DUP, Sinn Féin, whoever. We've got to have people talking to each other. The Good Friday Agreement was only a truce, that's all it was, it was an opportunity for people to say: look, we messed up here, didn't we; let's get together and see what we can do.

I worked in integrated education for over twenty years, and I think that's one giant step. The DUP hate it. Sinn Féin hate it. They think it's some sort of mish-mash of people. That's kids, side by side, they're not in the ghettos, they're not going to different schools. For me it was a massive experience. I'm looking down at my first class, saying: I wonder who the Prods are here? 'Cause I had never come in contact with Protestants, teaching over on the Falls Road. After about three weeks, I couldn't care less, didn't know who they were, or what they were, they were just kids to me. Now, integrated education isn't a panacea, but it is things like that, people getting together from both sides. But what we have – and I'll quote Davy Ervine again – is government giving out sweeties: two to you, two to you. The majority of people don't vote for Sinn Féin or the DUP, and are being left by the wayside. So we need to get some system that involves everybody and not just those two parties. Maybe to get together in some forums other than Stormont. What other country is there which hasn't had a parliament for two years? And they're all getting paid!

We need to get some system that involves everybody and not just those two parties. What other country is there which hasn't had a parliament for two years? And they're all getting paid!

[Peter Black] Here is a question: you've got Stormont, which everyone in this room seems to agree with. I don't. It is based on the notion that working-class people have two separate identities. What are those identities? People are saying we've got this tradition, or that tradition. A tradition based on what? Hatred for another identity? There is only *one* identity as far as I am concerned, so I am asking you: what it is about Stormont ... is it not a contradiction in terms having Stormont, talking about two different identities?

[Eamonn Lynch] Stormont can only take the people that's voted in, and people

might say we will have non-sectarian parties sooner or later. The reality is that there's two sectarian blocks there. We get the politicians we deserve, because we vote them in.

[**Deirdre Hargey**] Just something that Peter touched on earlier, around 'what's your definition of the conflict?' For me the 'conflict' didn't start in 1969, it didn't start in 1964, it was much deeper than that. I think you need to look at these events in an international context. I agree with Paddy in terms of the role of colonialism globally, the role of colonialism in Ireland and across these islands, and that's what we're dealing with. When you look at sectarianism, whether here in Ireland or in other parts of the world, creating divisions was one of the tactics. So you can't just look at this in terms of there were certain reactions in 1969 or '71. Of course there was sectarianism, but *what made it grow*, what happened? When you look at the pogroms that broke out after the Partition of Ireland in the early 20s. In 1969 people were looking back to when they were attacked 50 years before. For every action there is a reaction and we need to understand it.

The other issue for me: of course there is segregation on the basis of religion, because that's how the state was created. There was an ultra-conservative state created in the North, in the Six Counties, and there was an ultra-conservative state created in the South. But there's a class division, there's a class segregation in our city that no-one talks about, where people are dying... dying, because of their social class, and because of their living standards. And if people take that issue as the same as dealing with the religious issue then maybe we'll start to get somewhere.

Of course there was sectarianism, but what made it grow? ... There was an ultra-conservative state created in the North, and there was an ultra-conservative state created in the South.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] It seems to me that there are three different strands to this conversation so far. And one is some form of informal truth recovery process with all the difficulties and caveats attached to that. And then there is this discussion around Brexit and the current situation and how that is potentially very dangerous in terms of the damage that could follow. And the third one is how do we understand this so that we don't repeat it, and the words which keep

coming up are discussion, values, learning, questioning, civilian loss of life, international context, anti-sectarianism – issues that we need to keep in mind as we move through this set of discussions that Harry has organised. Just as with the brilliant work that the Fellowship of Messines has done over the years. And while we carry on all these discussions we have to be forward looking, otherwise, to quote David Ervine again, ‘we will be condemned to repeat it’.

[**Sean O’Hare**] Just one comment. Yes, we have to go through the process of blaming the Unionist government, British Imperialism, Dublin, the Catholic church... all that. But we also need to realise: what is going to be *our contribution*? As we meet here in these series of talks and discussions, what will be our contribution? Jimmy talked about the two wee lads fighting in the school yard; there’s another thing that kids often say: “Yes, I did it, but big lads *made* me do it.” So, we better think about how we’re going to change the future, and not falling into this thing of blaming everyone else – and accept that we done things ourselves. And what are *we* going to do to contribute to righting the wrongs in this society?

We [should not fall] into the thing of blaming everyone else, and accept that we done things ourselves. And what are we going to do to contribute to righting the wrongs in this society?

[**Paddy Mackel**] I think what we have tried to do in Ireland for the last couple of hundred years is to create the conditions for an absolute victory, so that somebody wins and therefore somebody loses. And I think the issue for me is how do we create a *new* Ireland, whether it is in a two-state situation, or a one-state situation, where everybody has the right to their identity, which is accepted by everybody and is embraced by everybody. I think if we can get to that stage we are in a different ball game, because then we will be talking as equals. And I don’t think we have attempted that yet. The Belfast Agreement was an attempt to let it all bubble away under the surface. I think that project, on that basis, has failed. I don’t agree with your point, Eamonn, that you exclude somebody, because the whole point of the Belfast Agreement was that everybody has the right to participate, and on equal grounds, and so if somebody feels that can’t do that, the way *not* to resolve that is to throw them out on the outside, and leave them to throw stones at those on the inside. I don’t think that’s the answer. I think it’s a matter of accepting that everyone has a right to their

identity, whether British or Irish, and they're entitled to it, and that's embraced by everybody. If we tackle this on the basis that everybody is equal and here's how we define an equal society, then I think we might move on.

[**Padraig Yeates**] Can I just say first of all that I agree absolutely with what's been said about a truth recovery, or information recovery, process. I think that's a very good idea and I can see it is edging towards that in the latest legacy consultation. But I still think there is a very fundamental problem if we are trying to solve these problems through the courts. Because when you go to court, it's a battle – and you win or you lose. How you win is by proving that the other side were wrong, and that is just perpetuating this. Like a lot of other people in this room, I suspect, I have done things which I regret; I have also done things which I would stand over, and say that given the circumstances that's what had to happen. But there are things I regret and they shouldn't have happened. At the time I was ignorant enough, or stupid enough, or arrogant enough – whatever you want to call it – to think they were justified. But today I would have to say that they weren't. But there would also be things where I would say: yes, we did that, and we are sorry we did it, but it had to be done.

So, it's not simple, it's not looking for revenge. We all know cases where people went to prison for things they *didn't* do. The focus is usually on people like the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four... and these were terrible things which happened... but I know people who went to prison for things they didn't do because the only alternative was to turn into a supergrass. That's the terrible problem that we have, we can have truth and justice on those terms but it is a very heavy price to pay for it. And we have been paying it the last fifty odd years, so I say we need to find another way of doing it.

And it's not that I want an amnesty to forget the past and say everything is hunky-dory, and it's terrible it happened, but let's move on. But we have to find an escape route from this awful situation. I don't think the Troubles will revive on the scale they did, but they will revive, and most importantly they will leave a divided society, which is the worst legacy we could possibly give to our kids and their kids.

I don't think the Troubles will revive on the scale they did, but they will revive, and most importantly they will leave a divided society, which is the worst legacy we could possibly give to our kids and their kids.

[**Jim McDermott**] In Kilmainham [Goal], in the civil war period, Patrick O’Keefe was the Governor. And he wasn’t a bad man, but certainly partial to a drink, and prone to saying the wrong stuff. But in the ceasefire period 1921 a lad from one of the English newspapers came and he wanted to find somebody to talk to and the only person he could find was Patrick O’Keefe. And he asked him: “What’s Sinn Féin policy at this time?” O’Keefe pulled out a large revolver, hit the table and said: “Revenge, Bejeezus, Revenge!” And that’s the danger, that those sort of romantic ideas get out. It was *not* romantic. The idea that some people have – from whatever community – oh, we are better than them, *we* will know how to get it right this time. It doesn’t work that way.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] So, we have had a fairly wide-ranging and honest conversation so far, which is very important. And I am wondering where we go from here. Harry has lined up a series of these talks. How do we widen this conversation?

[**Jim McDermott**] The elephant in the room here is making statements, and how we deal with it. Sean had some idea on this. The people *not* in the room are representatives of state agencies, and if you start saying “I did this in 1969”, they would be very interested in that; they might find it of extreme interest. Indeed, they had maybe been interested in that for a long time! In Mick Ryan’s book about the 1950s campaign, he mentioned some incidents. Now, Mick is 83-years-old yet the state agencies investigated him for what he revealed in his book.

[**Tim Smith**] As Jimmy says, when people talk about their involvement and are willing to make statements – even with the Boston Tapes and stuff – are they leaving themselves open to being taken to court? When Mick Ryan’s book came out, a week later it was in the newspapers that the police wanted to question him.

When people talk about their involvement and are willing to make statements – are they leaving themselves open to being taken to court?

[**Padraig Yeates**] He wasn’t actually there when they came to his house, but eventually he met the police with a solicitor, who said “my client doesn’t have anything to say”. For anyone not familiar with it, the process in the South – with regard to the North – is that the PSNI have no authority to question someone, but they can request the Gardai to assist them and they will sit in the room while the Gardai ask the questions. But nothing transpired from it. I do know that the Chief

Constable here told someone recently that the police had twelve new lines of inquiry relating to the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, as a result of the evidence given, even though people had immunity during that.

[**Sean Murray**] We have been dealing with these negotiations for quite a few years. We need legal protections which will facilitate people coming forward with relevant information, and there are a number of suggestions or ideas. First of all, an interlocutor is appointed for each group, so it is not the case of an individual coming forward. The interlocutor will go back and approach people who would give information which would then go back to the commission for information recovery. And it was predicated on the legislation for cases of the ‘disappeared’ whereby an interlocutor was established; they would then do all the research and come back with the relevant information. The problem is – and Jimmy made this point – if you talk to the cops, the cops will tell you that if anyone comes forward with information, they have a statutory responsibility to investigate, whether that is fifty years, eighty years or a hundred years. So you need to have legislative protections giving immunity for the information coming forward, otherwise the legislation is not worth the paper it is written on. Then they talked about sequencing, whereby investigations will be carried out first, and only then, once they have been completed, would you have an information recovery mechanism kicking in, and there would be no fear of any prosecution. The thing is, unless you have those protections in that legislation, it is not going to happen, and people need to accept that.

[**Padraig Yeates**] What about when individuals might want to come forward?

[**Sean Murray**] It’s possible. But this is a small place, and if you’re seen going in with information, people will ask: “What’s he saying to them?” So, how can we deal effectively with the fears and concerns of people who have that information, to allow them to bring it forward?

How can we deal effectively with the fears and concerns of people who have that information, to allow them to bring it forward?

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Can I be provocative?

Why do we have to have a focus on a Truth Recovery process? Is it for the historical record? Is it so that people feel better? Is it so that people who lost people, or were injured, get better information?

[**Sean Murray**] I think it is the last one, that’s the main one. The families want

information. A cousin of my wife was shot dead, and to this day the police haven't went to her family to say "your daughter has been shot dead". So any little piece of information is important to the family. *Why* was our daughter shot dead? They want an explanation, not that they want anyone to end up in court over it, they just want an explanation, and the circumstances surrounding it. So that's the main drive for an information recovery mechanism. And it's also about learning; it is debunking myths to a certain extent as well. Families have been left with myths: what happened was because of A or B or whatever. So it helps to deal with some of these myths.

[**Padraig Yeates**] Going back to Deirdre's question, it is not for revenge... there can be an element of that, but it is wider than that. But at the same time I think that there would be difficulties if they said: we'll let everybody off, nobody is going to be prosecuted... You have to say why you did something. If you're a young soldier at a checkpoint and you fire a gun it is usually because someone has told you to fire that gun, but the person who told you is not the person who ends up in the dock. So, there are consequences for people, and the more truthful it is, or the more open it is, the more accurate it is, the better... And it is also, hopefully, one way of trying to reconcile people.

The more truthful [any information recovery process] is, or the more open it is, the more accurate it is, the better ... And it is also, hopefully, one way of trying to reconcile people.

But what *type* of process? Now, I was often in the labour court, in negotiation with management, and nine times out of ten you get a solution, rather than going on strike. But it was often third-party shuttle diplomacy: you'd be in one room, the employers in the other. A court is a sort of trial by combat; they may have taken away the battle-axes and the swords, but it is the same thing: you have a winner and a loser, and that decides who's right and who's wrong. And it leaves a lot of people, even on the winning side, disappointed; they never got to find out 'why', only that that man did it and he's going down for it.

[**Martin Lynch**] I kind of think that there are so many categories of people who want some legacy discussion. It seems to me that having one big truth commission, that would be bound by all these dimensions of regulations, and what you can say and can't say, and so on, wouldn't necessarily serve the right purpose. Is there some kind of way of having community forums, smaller forums

where people can come along and, as Sean says, if it's a particular murder then they can seek out information on that? Or someone can come along and say I want somebody arrested for a shooting... and they can say that as well. But in a smaller, less-spotlighted process. I don't know if that might be best.

[**Padraig Yeates**] I agree. It should be confidential. The proposal we came up with was that only if people on both sides, if you like, had agreed a reconciliation between them on what had happened, on the truth if you like, and when both sides were happy with that, and they wanted it published, they could. And if they wanted to advocate the process they could but it had to be ex-combatant or perpetrator and victim/survivor, who had to be happy with that to make that decision, it wouldn't happen otherwise. Otherwise it would be in camera and what happened was between all the parties.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Your idea is interesting, Martin, in terms of some sort of community-based process. If you remember when the policing consultations were going on they went round all the towns and had meetings. I remember hearing this story of a venue in Newtownabbey called 'The Barn', a reconciliation centre, and there was a public meeting and somebody stood up and said something about their involvement in the Troubles. And what happened next was the anger that was unleashed in the room, coming from people who were *not* involved in anything, but who were civilians – to use that term – and who were really angry at how their lives had been disrupted and changed utterly, by living through the Troubles. And it seems to me that that voice has to be heard too, and maybe that voice has to be heard at the cost of the victims' voice and at the cost of the combatants' voice, because those are the two big voices in society at the moment when we talk about this stuff.

[And there was an] anger unleashed in the room, coming from people who were not involved in anything, but who were angry at how their lives had been changed utterly by living through the Troubles.

[**Deirdre Hargey**] It's also how you manage a process like that. When you were talking I was thinking about my own area. Not all of the loss and conflict originated from outside, a lot of the time it was *internal* conflict. I lived in the Markets and there were divisions within the broad republican family in that area, which has been in some ways passed on to the children. But obviously we have a responsibility as a community to try and build cohesion, even within that one

community. And so what would a suitable process look like, given that it is such a small area? And when the hurt was done internally, in some ways it is felt even deeper. And so how would you manage it?

I know sometimes you nearly suppress it, and say: let's look forward – and I know that doesn't satisfy everyone. But you do want to look forward as well, in terms of building cohesion in a community, and dealing with economic and social issues. I wouldn't be opposed to that, but what would be the mechanisms, how would you manage it? I suppose it is because we are such a small place, and people generally do know each other, or somebody will know them and they will connect it back. So how do you get the information that some people need? And my other concern is in terms of therapies, in terms of how you support people, and maybe that is something that as a society we haven't really looked at.

And my other concern is in terms of therapies, in terms of how you support people, and maybe that is something that as a society we haven't really looked at.

And when you throw on top of that there are still those policies that come from colonialism. It has also been touched on here about the current issues which are impacting on people's lives. The issues of drugs, suicide, homelessness, even just in terms of the poverty gap, and how that is all having an impact. There are linkages back to '69, even though it is in a completely different context now, but we have to be sure that we're looking at all those issues also.

[Billy McQuiston] Just as a point of interest. The Prison to Peace group a couple of years back tasked each of the ex-combatant groups to bring in a paper about truth recovery, and there were two things that basically every group was saying. Number one was that no-one should speak without some form of amnesty, they could speak without the fear of going to prison. The other was that: well, I'm not going to tell the truth unless the governments are going to tell the truth. Those were the two main issues that came out of that.

[Eamonn Lynch] Was the DPP, John Larkin, being too harsh when he said this is going to take too long, is going to cost too much money; we could spend the money on reconciliation programmes, or have a wee memorial in every town and village with a simple 'for those who died during the Troubles', and just get on with it? With the object of living and trying to make sure that that sort of

thing never happened again. That people going into a bookies, or a pub, and putting a bomb in it, these things will never happen again. And I agree with Larkin by the way.

[Erskine Holmes] I would be worried about this silent majority you were talking about, who suddenly become very vocal when people admit to being involved with something. I was the first person arrested on 5 October 1968 in

Duke Street in Derry, and I have kept that relatively quiet for the last fifty years, because as a Protestant featuring at the front of a march that broke the law and went through a police cordon and you got arrested, you could imagine what reaction there would have been to me claiming that. If, on the other hand, I had been a ‘unity’ candidate, or a nationalist candidate, it would have been a badge of honour and you could wear it to get you votes and even end up Minister for Community Relations. Instead of that, I went back and stood as a Labour candidate in Armagh in 1970, and stood *against* a unity candidate, who was basically the Catholic unity candidate. I just throw that in as a personal recollection because you want some personal recollections, as to what people were involved in and what they did.

I would also remind you that there have been a couple of exceptional measures taken under the old Stormont administration, that were just done on the stroke of a pen. I was charged with what I did on 5 October 1968 along with a lot of others, like Eamonn McCann and Ivan Cooper and so on. I was one of those people dragged before the courts – only to be amnestied at the stroke of a pen! And, as a result of that, I was able to get my pension entitlement back from Antrim County Education Committee, because those days which I took off to go to the trial in Derry weren’t pensionable. If you are found guilty you lose your pension entitlement for that period of time. If, on the other hand, you are found not guilty, you get it back. And I said to the headmaster: what do we do if I am amnestied, and he said we’ll see how it works out. But at a stroke of a pen the charges were dropped. Were they dropped by the RUC? Were they dropped by Bill Craig? Were they dropped by Terence O’Neill? I have no idea, but there *was* an amnesty.

And then there was another sort of amnesty. If you had an illegal weapon, which, let’s say, you were holding for your own defence, in a situation where

With the object of trying to make sure that that sort of thing never happened again. That people going into a bookies, or a pub, and putting a bomb in it, these things will never happen again.

there had been a breakdown of law and order, you could go and hand it into the police station and there were no questions asked. So there was another amnesty under the old system. I am sure that if there was a willingness to get this thing sorted, it could be sorted, because it is getting to the stage were people like me – I will be 80 in February next year – people of my age who were involved in '68, '69, and people who were involved in a lot more than I was involved in, they would just like to make a clean breast of it.

Also, I was on the Falls Road on the 12th August when two firemen were petrol-bombed and turned into human torches. And someone said: "They're not policemen", and someone else said, "It doesn't matter, let them burn anyway." Now, that was the beginning of an attitude of mind among young people that doesn't make them out to be innocent savages.

There was an interesting letter in the *Irish Times* from Brian Walker, former Head of Irish Studies at Queen's University. He had been at Magee and had been a steward for the Derry Citizens Action Committee for the big march in which some 20,000 people turned out for civil rights, from all sections of the community, in November 1968. But he was *not* a steward when the Derry Citizens Defence Association were organising the defence of the Bogside which led to the stoning of the Apprentice Boys and the petrol-bombing of the RUC and the Apprentice Boys, by the young people. Now, who instructed them how to make petrol bombs and so on? I watched on television a masked adult on the top of Rossville flats instructing a young man on how to make a petrol bomb. So it wasn't a matter of young people going out and doing the things they did; there were people behind them who had their own agenda. In this case it was to create a socialist revolution, or in somebody's else belief it might have been that they just wanted to settle the sovereign Republic of Ireland question that had been left in abeyance as far as he was concerned.

So it wasn't a matter of young people going out and doing the things they did; there were people behind them who had their own agenda.

[**Rosie Graves**] Isn't it a very different timescale now? It once might have been a political situation, but now it seems to be controlled by drugs and territory and it's a very different feel from what I can see. I was at the hospital on Friday night and there was a young lad there who was, or had been, under the influence of drugs, and he says he's going to end up shot if he goes out on the street,

because he kept some of the money for himself. He wasn't the only one in the Mater Hospital; I was surprised by how many young people were being admitted for beatings, real serious beatings from the paramilitaries, in the name of drugs, not in the name of politics or what you've all been talking about. It's a different ball game altogether now, and how do you actually try to stop it? Some of these groups may try to link what they're doing to the conflict or whatever else, but to me it's nothing more than the Mafia.

[**Sean Murray**] That's the situation we are facing at the moment. You have criminal gangs who are masquerading as paramilitaries, who are taxing drug dealers and collecting drug debts. And the scene is getting really scary. Somebody showed me a video of young people injecting heroin at 2 o'clock in the afternoon in Castle Street.

[**Rosie Graves**] It's a completely different arena, but it needs to be part of this conversation. But how do you go about addressing it? To me the present situation has got no real bearing on what went on before. As well as that, there are more peace-lines now than ever before. You drive through the Shankill/Falls and it's all peace-walls and segregation, and if you have got all that segregation it is a recipe for fear and judgments, it creates divides within communities. It fuels the unrest and fuels the fear. Plus the drug dealers can go ahead. Who is benefiting from it, that's what I would like to know. What politicians are aware of what is going on? If they wanted to put a stop to it, they can. I mean, trafficking is becoming a bigger issue than ever before. Even as a trainee social worker going into some of the places we have concerns over some of the parents who are being trafficked sexually or for servitude. And Northern Ireland is becoming a cesspit, and an excuse for unbelievable atrocities.

I think that what is happening *right now* would also need to be confronted, just as much as people coming to terms with what happened in the past. I do not really believe that that is an

issue any more; I think for most people growing up, well, yes, this happened, but let's get on with it... except when you go into particular areas you can see it, there is more of a divide within particular areas in Northern Ireland, but they are the ones who are most segregated from each other, that fear is instilled. Everybody

I think what is happening right now [drugs, beatings, human trafficking] would also need to be confronted, just as much as people coming to terms with what happened in the past.

else is moving forward, apart from these areas. And that's where these drug problems are worse.

[**Deirdre Hargey**] I think that just shows up the class segregation again. People talk about the peace-walls, but every peace-wall is beside a socially-deprived community. And we also have *invisible* barriers in terms of social class. In the Markets, an area that I was born and bred in and still live in, a majority of men are now dead by their sixties and seventies, and a large part of that was because of the social class in the area. They die on average ten years younger than someone who lives up the Malone Road. Part of my concern is that those who are writing social policies don't live in those communities; those who are instructing budgets don't live in those communities either, and I think that is part of the problem, this social elite that is disconnected from that reality.

And you need to look at all these things in a wider national or international context, because the issue of austerity... even if we had a functioning Assembly the budget is being squeezed, it's being continually cut. I watched a news programme where playgrounds were being closed right across England. The Tory government is just slashing local council budgets and this is the social impact that it is having, and also in terms of drugs and other things...

The same is happening in America as well. I was watching a Michael Moore documentary the other night; he was looking at the Trump presidency and working-class areas like Michigan, to try and understand what's going on below the surface. And again it is that sense of a class struggle that's really coming to the fore, but is dressed up as something else. I talked about it in Belfast, and as a councillor it is a double-edged sword in terms of there's all these lovely growth agendas, and we're out to 'sell the City', but you're selling the City for the top percent who will rise to the top, while the rest of the population will just be left behind. They're already being left behind and that's part of the difficulty. So when you go in and try and talk to people like that about reconciliation, they're more worried that they're going to have money to feed their family.

When you go in and try and talk to people about reconciliation, they're more worried that they're going to have money to feed their family.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] You're reminding me that at the time of the Good Friday Agreement there were all those discussions going on, with social inclusion

strategies, and it's as if we have forgotten all that stuff, and so when we talk about how we make sure that things don't happen again, and what type of society we want, we have to factor those things in.

[Deirdre Hargey] We can get stuck into looking at the past, but what are the values that are going to drive us going forward, no matter what the constitutional end will be? What are the values?

Is it a rights-based society; what is the role of trade unions and other groups...? And maybe that's what we need to get into, what those core values are, and is there something broad enough that we can all buy into collectively, which actually gives hope? For one of the things, especially when you look at drugs or suicide, is that everything, particularly in the media, seems doom and gloom. You start to think that, in your everyday life, what impact does that have on community, in terms of actually getting people active. That was the link that Michael Moore made in America. He was saying that there is an underclass that develops and people are just left, and that allows extremists to rise.

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[Deirdre Mac Bride] But also factoring in the stories of the Troubles and what society it is that we want to build. And being conscious of what contribution we make, what it is we are trying to build.

[Harry Donaghy] I was reminded that people's experiences, good and bad, can radically shift from one position to another. In 2009 we had a group which brought together individuals from the Royal Irish Old Comrades Association, veterans from Operation Harvest, and others. We did a series of visits, including to the Crumlin Road jail, where most of the IRA veterans had spent some time, and then held a series of meetings, a conference and a seminar. And one Saturday afternoon we brought the combined group to the Waterfront Hall where Sam Thompson's play *Over the Bridge* was being restaged. There was a packed audience, and our group were invited to an after-play round-table talk. During the conversation Mick Ryan put his hand up and said, "On reflection, I know now and understand that Sam Thompson's play caused more discomfiture to the Unionist government than anything we were doing in the IRA." The impact of this, and it

helped people like him, and others, was that there had to be other alternatives than simply militaristic responses to political, social and economic problems.

So again, taking part, people inputting into these types of programmes, we are under no illusions about the difficulties involved, the situation where people, and communities, find themselves, and all the pressures and tensions that are there. But I think now more than ever we need to be contributing to civilised and meaningful discourses, because one thing which is scary about where we're at at the minute – and various speakers have touched on it – we have a generation now who have no physical contact with what took place back then. These are the peace generation. But sectarianism, hatred, enmity, mistrust, is as rampant now as it ever was and the opportunities for those conversations to take place are not increasing, they are getting squeezed smaller and smaller.

If we attempt to do anything through people engaging, it is to prove to young people that it is okay, it is good, for people who are maybe diametrically opposed on their national identities and allegiances, to be able to talk in a civilised manner to one another, and find those common denominators that most people hold in common. But where we are at the minute the conversations at the top levels are getting more shriller, more intolerant, and the effects that that is having, in percolating down to communities, is encouraging all – or some of – the worst instincts in people. The space is becoming more and more narrow. And it isn't a good place to be for a society that would still describe itself as civilised in the modern sense.

But where we are at the minute the conversations at the top levels are getting more shriller, more intolerant, and the effects that that is having, in percolating down to communities, is encouraging some of the worst instincts in people.

Deirdre Mac Bride Could I just add one thing. If we want to have a discussion about what type of society we want, we need to involve young people in that type of discussion. Can I thank Padraig, Jimmy, Harry, and everyone who came along to this discussion today.