Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries

(Discussion 8)

'Republicanism 1962-1972: the Legacy'

Guest Speaker

Author & Historian

Dr Brian Hanley, Dublin

(Joe McCann 50th Anniversary Commemorative Talk)

compiled by

Michael Hall

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The Fellowship of Messines Association

Office 507, Scottish Provident Building
7 Donegall Square West, Belfast BT1 6JH

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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 to realistic peace-building.

In 2020 the Association launched its 'Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries' programme. This programme would comprise a series of discussions which were intended to create opportunities for participants, from various backgrounds and political viewpoints, to engage in open discussion on some of the more significant historical events of 100 years and 50 years ago, the consequences of which all of us are still living with today.

The theme for this discussion was: *Republicanism 1962-1972: the Legacy*. The keynote speaker was **Dr Brian Hanley**, author and historian. He was followed by three panellists: **Tom Hartley**, **Sean O'Hare** and **Roy Garland**. The event was chaired by **Deirdre Mac Bride**.

The invited audience who participated in the general discussion, and in the Q&A sessions, represented a wide diversity of political backgrounds and allegiances, and many of them would have had direct experience of the period and events under discussion.

Also present were the family of Joe McCann, an Official IRA Commander who had been shot dead in April 1972 in Joy Street in the Markets area of Belfast.

Harry Donaghy, Project Manager, The Fellowship of Messines Association

Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries

'Republicanism 1962-1972: the Legacy'

keynote speaker **Dr Brian Hanley**

(Joe McCann 50th Anniversary Commemorative Talk)

Martin Connolly: On behalf of the Fellowship of Messines can I welcome everyone here today.This event also complements the commemoration which the McCann family held yesterday, and hopefully you all enjoy it. So without further ado, I will hand you over to Deirdre Mac Bride, our Chair for today.

Deirdre Mac Bride: Thank you, Martin. This is one of a series of discussions entitled 'Reflections on Centenaries and Anniversaries'. **Dr Brian Hanley** will make the keynote presentation; he will be followed by our panellists, and then we will open it up for any questions and further discussion. **Dr Brian Hanley** is Assistant Professor of 20th Century Irish History at UCD, and his research interests include Republicanism and radicalism, particularly the politics of the Irish Republican Army and the impact of conflict on the South. And his forthcoming book, which will be published this year, is *The Global Impact of the Irish Revolution*. He will be followed by **Tom Hartley** who is an expert on the seventies in Belfast, and Milltown and City cemeteries, and one of the founders of Feile an Phobail, a past lord mayor of Belfast (2008-2009), and was both secretary and chairperson of Sinn Féin. Tom will be followed by **Roy Garland**, the author of *Gusty Spence*, and a journalist. He has also been active since the 1960s as a Unionist, a critic and an independent thinker. Roy will be followed by **Sean O'Hare** a lifelong Official Irish republican, and one of the founders of the Fellowship of Messines and the 6th Connaught Rangers Research Group, which in 2017 succeeded in one of its primary objectives of placing a plaque to the men who fell near the village of Ronssoy, France, in the Spring of 1918. I will now hand over to Brian.

Brian Hanley: Good morning and thanks very much for the opportunity to speak here today; thanks also to the McCann family for involving me in commemorative events and to the Fellowship of Messines for organizing this particular event. The year in which Joe McCann was killed was unprecedented in terms of its human cost. Almost 500 people were killed, and these losses continue to shape our societies, north and south, today. Joe McCann was one of almost 140 people killed by state forces over the

early years of the conflict; like those in Ballymurphy, in Derry and on the Shankill later in 1972 he was killed by the Parachute regiment. Joe McCann was unapologetically a revolutionary, but many of those killed by the forces of the state were not; and while Joe McCann and his comrades would not have thought of it in those terms, this was a government and armed forces of the United Kingdom using counter-insurgency techniques developed in the dying days of Empire against what, in theory at least, were its own citizens. But many others died that year too, large numbers of them also civilians, and one of the problems of grappling with the legacy of the conflict, and the role of republicans within it, is that of course there were many bereaved and traumatised by *their* actions as well.

I'm going to try and very briefly give an overview of some of the developments within republicanism after 1962, but I also want to touch on some of the wider issues thrown up by the discussions around them; because while nobody in 1972 had the time or probably the inclination to think about it, that year was also the 50th anniversary not only of the Irish Civil War, so crucial to republican memory, but also of a whole series of other incidents: the McMahon murders, Weaver Street, the Northern Offensive and so on, which many alive in 1972 could actually remember. These events also cast a long shadow and shaped the responses of some of those in both republican and loyalist camps. As I have said, my comments today will necessarily be truncated, but I'll be drawing heavily on previous discussions facilitated by the Fellowship of Messines which are available through the *Island Pamphlets* series compiled by Michael Hall, and accessible through the CAIN archive website.

Any republican discussion of the 1960s is naturally viewed through the lens of the 'split' in 1969/70 and the subsequent development of the Officials and the Provisionals. But when the IRA's Border Campaign ended in 1962 it is fair to say that nobody in the leadership of the republican movement envisaged the events of a decade later. We must not make the mistake either of assuming that there was an inevitable path taken by participants, or that organizations in their later form were the result of decisions taken in the 1960s. I am going to try to give an overview of these events, but I understand that many who were present at that time may disagree or who would certainly have very different interpretations of key events. There are very real reasons for the strong feelings which exist around these issues. In November 1975 the *Irish Times* described the ongoing conflict between the Official and Provisional IRAs in Belfast as the 'bloodiest fighting between republicans since the Civil War.' So I am

aware that there were very real human consequences, which people are still living with, and consequently genuine emotion which colours how people view the split and its aftermath. As an activist since the mid-1960s it was the case that Joe McCann had friends on both sides of that divide; that there was a later split in the Official republican movement in 1974-75 (producing the Irish Republican Socialist Party), further complicates the story. Again people who were friends and comrades of Joe McCann took opposite sides; again bitterness endures for genuine reasons. However, you also find that today many people who were not around at the time have strong views on what occurred and this ensures that the terminology associated with the splits remains current; indeed sometimes it seems that people who weren't there have the most pronounced views of all. We may consider in discussion how important people think certain issues and ideas were, but I'll try and avoid cliches, if I can.

For many commentators the story begins with the end of the Border Campaign in 1962. That campaign was not quite the chivalrous affair that is sometimes depicted, but it was obviously less bloody than what happened after 1970 or indeed between 1920-22 (though how bloody that earlier period was seems to have been lost on many people by the 1950s). Many of the ideas subsequently discussed by republicans carried echoes of debates which had taken place during the post-Civil War period but they occurred in a very new era. Ireland, north and south, was quite a different place during the 1960s than even a decade previously. To those outside the ranks of republicans it seemed as if the two states on the island were actually coming slightly closer together; meetings between Seán Lemass and Terence O'Neill, ministerial visits exchanged between Charles Haughey and Harry West, Niall Blaney and Bill Craig, and so on. Wider international trends were clearly influential as well; hence the use of terms such as 'civil rights' or 'National Liberation Front'. In terms of republican history there was nothing new about long periods of re-organization following attempted rebellions; there had been 16 years between the IRA dumping arms at the end of the Civil War and its first official campaign in 1939; and 11 years between the end of that in 1945 and the beginning of the Border Campaign. There were only seven years between the end of that Border campaign and August 1969 (which sometimes seems to escape people who wonder why the IRA in the 1960s was taking so long to organize another campaign). But it is also important to say that large numbers of people had dropped out of active engagement with the republican movement after the campaign and are not really part of these discussions.

After the campaign there was some change at leadership level, Cathal Goulding became Chief of Staff and Tomás Mac Giolla Sinn Féin president; in 1964 Liam McMillen became IRA commander in Belfast and I think it was around then that Joe McCann and others also became involved. I should say that the impact of the Divis Street riots that year has probably been underestimated by historians in terms of its impact on working-class Belfast nationalists.

Now I'm going to very briefly mention a few major assertions about this era:

One is that the IRA became 'Marxist' or was becoming 'Marxist'. In fact there was a very slow and cautious move left, which was actually far less radical rhetorically than positions that the IRA had taken in the 1930s. I don't believe the majority of the IRA leadership were Marxists, in the sense of adopting a clear-cut strategy laid down by communist intellectuals, etc. But the *belief* that they were was a powerful one and is stressed again and again in the context of 1969-72. In fact, the IRA in 1931 had adopted a far more left-wing programme than anything proposed during the 1960s; that year the movement's leader Maurice Twomey stated that if it 'was communism to want to undo the conquest … then the IRA was a communist organisation.' There was no chance of any IRA leader saying anything remotely like that during the 1960s and in fact there are numerous statements denying communist influence. And on international affairs the movement was also careful than while condemning America's war on Vietnam, in 1968 Tomás MacGiolla also condemned 'the imperialism of Russia when she invades Czechoslovakia … any big nation which tries to dominate and control a smaller nation is acting in an imperialist way.' But the IRA had split over these issues in the 1930s (with the formation of the Republican Congress) and there seems to have been a real desire to even avoid talking about them from the late 1930s onwards. That is not to say there were not socialists of various types in the republican movement and the movement formally declared in favour of a socialist republic in 1967; but this was still an eclectic blend.

But there is a genuine effort to engage with working-class politics, and move away from the idea of just another armed campaign (though not an abandonment of arms themselves). And some of that is stimulated by a variety of people brought into contact with republicans through the Wolfe Tone Societies, then through trade unions and cultural bodies, and engagement with land and housing protests. Now along with that there is a preoccupation, which carries over post-split to some extent, with the idea that the southern state is moving towards membership of the EEC, but there are also

indications that there might be the possibility of reaching the northern protestant working class. That is stimulated in part by the relative success of the Northern Ireland Labour Party in 1958 and after; and by what seems to be some evidence of the breaking down of sectarian division. Now, to divert backwards again; these weren't new ideas either. In the early 1930s the IRA had tried various means to connect with working-class loyalists, an appeal to the Orange Order in July 1932 being one initiative (and this was distributed up in Sandy Row and elsewhere in Belfast). A few months later when a major railway strike took place, the IRA intervened on the side of the largely Protestant strikers; a report from the senior IRA officer Sean Russell stated that 'It is the most promising of all to find 'B' Specials who are on strike in search of IRA assistance. What a change to find one group of 'Specials' searching the houses of our men while another can be found collaborating with them! The bombs used upon the railway station in Belfast a few days ago causing considerable damage were supplied by the O/C Belfast and thrown by B Specials.' Even that example is not unique; in 1914 the leading Tyrone republican Patrick McCartan had loaned his car to the UVF during the Larne gun-running (something which Roger Casement publicly boasted about shortly afterwards). So the idea of connecting with loyalists was not new, though how much awareness there was of earlier events is unclear; there often doesn't seem to have been an 'institutional memory' of them within republicanism.

And while the events of 1920-22 in Belfast are burned literally into nationalist memory, outside of the city you often find little reference to them. The complexities of how local republicans took sides (more than two by the way) in the subsequent Civil War split was largely lost, and is only being uncovered now by the work of those like Jimmy McDermott, Kieran Glennon, Paddy Mulroe and so on. You find very little sense in republican discussions or publications between the 1920s and 1960s that defence of nationalists in Belfast was a key task for the IRA. Even as late as July 1969, when Jimmy Steele made his famous criticisms of the IRA leadership for allegedly embracing the ideas of 'Chairman Mao' he made no reference at all to what was then developing in Belfast. So there are dangers in reading things backwards. But the growing backlash within unionism and loyalism towards change was underestimated and misunderstood.

What was new was the emphasis on civil rights. This again is a hugely contentious area, and who was or wasn't there remains disputed. There were people who end up on both Official and Provisional sides who were active in the civil rights movement,

along with a variety of others; Kevin Agnew was a member of the NICRA executive, for example. But when you look at civil rights agitation at a local level you get a sense not of a grand strategy, but of events on the ground both forcing the pace and of activists responding to them, rather than to a plan laid down at a meeting in Maghera in 1966, or in Belfast in 1967. My view is that very few nationalists, and certainly very few republicans, saw this as a matter of 'demanding British rights for British citizens.' Obviously Joe McCann was one of those active and he appears in photographs from the time. And I think there is a period of hope – I should also stress that it is after October 1968 that popular opinion in the south starts to take notice of the north again in a big way.

The authorities had also started to take notice of the IRA again; despite the retrospective view that it had practically disappeared after 1962, the newspapers in 1967 and 1968 have lots of coverage of either republican-led social initiatives or armed actions in support of them. Again people tend to view these through the prism of the modern conflict; but that was unprecedented, even in terms of 1920-22 in many ways. So the Irish government, who were putting great emphasis on attracting foreign investment were rather put out by the burning of buses during strikes and so on. In 1969 the senior civil servant Peter Berry urged that divisions within the IRA be exploited so that the 'result would be (as in the Republican Congress Movement) a split in the IRA organisation and the communist element would become discredited.' Now Berry was not talking about setting up a new IRA that the government would control; he was hoping for a situation as in the 1930s when the IRA would split in rival factions who would then become irrelevant. And there was no mention at all of the North in these reports.

The divisions that Berry referred to, were in part about perceived Marxist influence and that is certainly a factor in disputes during the 1960s; even more they were about the idea first raised by Goulding in 1965, of abandoning abstentionism and tacitly accepting Leinster House, and even Stormont. For people from outside republicanism these issues can seem a bit abstract – but for the generation of post-Civil War republicans they seemed to go to the heart of what they believed in. And these issues caused huge disputes and would have probably led to some form of split anyway. And you had the full gamut of opinions across the movement, not all of which either are a perfect guide to where people end up after 1970. But in the spring of 1969 internally quite a lot of discussion is about these issues.

And then all changed utterly. Joe McCann was one of those republicans on the ground in August 1969, as were others present here today. Obviously those who were present know more about it than me. But my view, which I've tried to base on the available evidence, is that the idea that the Dublin IRA leadership either didn't want to defend nationalists, or deliberately didn't defend them because they were tied to a grand plan of not antagonizing unionists, is untenable. The IRA in Belfast *didn't* run away, and what's more the idea that most nationalists thought they had is tied up in retrospective politics.

But there is more to this story than the IRA; the Unionist establishment, the British government, the Irish state, working-class loyalism, organised labour, the churches and so on. Both sides of the republican split responded differently to the multiple crises after 1970; perhaps changes that would have occurred politically anyway were accelerated while others were deferred. The Officials continued to emphasize civil rights mobilisation, warn of the dangers of civil war and maintained that Stormont might be democratized in some form, while also allowing for armed action through 'defence and retaliation.' The Provisionals by 1972 were declaring that the 'Year of Victory' was in prospect and believing that a massively escalated armed struggle had not only brought down Stormont but would lead to British withdrawal. And indeed after Bloody Sunday that seemed to be the popular mood in nationalist Ireland. We now have the benefit of hindsight and it is easy to lecture those who were there at the time on what was right or wrong. The human cost looms large and it is that which will continue to overshadow any discussion of the legacies of those years.

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Tom Hartley: Thanks, Brian, for your thought-provoking piece, although I found, in some senses, that it left more questions than answers. And maybe this process that we are engaged in today will only be the start of a more scholarly approach to those events of fifty, sixty years ago. In my view, the 'split' left a very divisive and bitter legacy. And it had a very, very long tail. In 1986, when the decision to get rid of abstentionism was being debated, the memory of the split was there, and for those of us who were involved in that period, a lot of unseen work went into preparing a base for that decision. And, indeed, I think that if you look at the period of the 'peace process', there was the realisation that in negotiations, one negotiates *internally* as much as one negotiates *externally*. That given the memory of the split, there were attempts to minimise the impact of these political problems internally. So I think that period has a very long tail,

which probably still needs to be explored. I also want to thank the Fellowship of Messines for providing a platform for this type of discussion, where ideas can be surfaced and dealt with in a way that allows all of us to progress in our thinking about historical periods that we came through.

Brian, one of the points you make is that any republican discussion of the sixties is viewed through the lens of 1969, and the development of Officials and Provisionals. Now many people, it strikes me, will see those labels as a badge of honour. But I am also wondering: can those labels also *stop* us viewing many individuals in their humanity as they involved themselves in a life of political activism? Can those labels in fact at times be a *barrier* to understanding the commitment of individuals to a progressive and democratic future?

In the context of terms like 'Marxist', to what extent do these terms just become really propaganda as opposed to a political understanding of what's being discussed? I find that many words used in political discussion are really meant to *stop* you thinking, rather than *get you* thinking. And I think that is an element of what's taking place in the 1960s. You also talked about the events of 1920-22 being literally burned into the nationalist memory. In Belfast just under 500 people died in this city in that two-year period. In fact only two minutes walk from here, York Street, whatever way you look at it historically, was a killing ground. Now, that period is part of the nationalist psyche of this city. To what extent then is that also compounded within the nationalist community's sense of being deserted, being left to their own devices? As we explore these periods we also have to explore the psychological impact. I suspect that nationalists didn't expect that Partition was going to happen, and many nationalists were deeply shocked and traumatised that it *did* happen. It seems to me that that is part of the legacy that we need to deal with.

You talked about that abandonment of abstentionism and I find it ironic, in terms of how that situation was viewed by many in the 1960s, for instance the debates that took place within Sinn Féin in the 1980s around the very same issue. In 1904 in this city when the Dungannon Clubs were formed, the very first debate they had was of the 'Hungarian Policy', which was of abstentionism. Those issues were very deep-rooted within the republican leadership. Now, it seems to me that in relation to the 1960s, and the impact of the politics of the 1960s, particularly 1969, did no-one see what was unfolding, in the context of the nationalist community? My sense of growing up in what I called the 'northern Catholic population' – and 'northern Catholic' for me is a

political term, as opposed to a religious term – it is a broad sense of being part of a community that felt under really deep pressure. And one senses at the time, particularly from the older generation, a very deep sense of resentment, and a deep anger, and many had reached a sense of powerlessness. And to understand this I think you have to look at what happened in 1964 in what is known as the 'Divis Street riots'†, because I think that those riots signposted a very deep change in that population. It is a signpost of something happening underneath the surface of political life that couldn't be seen. There was a younger generation who had decided in their heads that they weren't taking any more, and I think you saw that on the streets, in the way the younger generation reacted to the RUC. But I think there is something deeper happening in the northern Catholic psyche, and I mean that in a political sense, which I don't think many people actually thought about or analysed.

And then, of course, in 1966 you have other events: there is a young man, John Patrick Scullion who was murdered in the Clonard area, there was Peter Ward who was murdered in Malvern Street... these killings impacted deeply, I think, across the community. In fact, there was a woman on the Shankill Road, Matilda Gould, who lived beside a Catholic-owned pub or off-licence, who when they firebombed it she was seriously injured and died later. And then as we go into 1968, and we have the Caledon housing squat, and the first Civil Rights march. There is all this stuff bubbling under the surface, and it breaks out in 1969: you can see it at Burntollet, you can see it in Derry and in Bombay Street. The UVF were active at the time and they bombed the reservoirs, hoping that the IRA would get the blame and that Terence O'Neill would be replaced, and of course they were highly successful in that.

So, the question that I want to pose that comes out of your paper: what does it say about the leadership – and I am talking about the leadership of the broad republican movement – who had no understanding of the psychology of resentment, and you might say rebelliousness, bubbling away and then it burst out in 1969. And in relation to the split that followed, I think there are a number of questions that I suppose I would like answered, but in a scholarly way, and maybe not for today but at some point in the

† 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.

future. Where did the momentum for the split originate? Who were the advocates of this split? Did the upheaval in the North assist those advocating the split? Was the split used in a way to dump internal opposition? Was there a will to avoid the split? Because it seems to me that if there is an upheaval within the ranks of any organisation there is the responsibility on all to try and understand the dynamics of that, and deal with it. And so how much leadership was available, in dealing with the underlying tensions? I mean, was there a will to say: look, there is something wrong here, we need to do something about it. How do we communicate in the broadest possible way a sense of leadership and direction... Now maybe all of that happened. Because I think we need to answer that question. But for me, what I am curious about is: was there a willingness at the time to deal with the internal tensions, to alleviate them, or even just to recognise them and find an avenue? Because as I said in my opening remarks, I believe the split was a disaster, and left such a bitter, bitter legacy.

Roy Garland: I am a Unionist, I come from a Shankill Road unionist background, although a completely non-political one. We went to a wee church in Percy Street, which was actually a wooden hut. The church originated from America and they actually emphasised unity between *all* Christians. And one day a speaker came along and issued a long diatribe which involved the IRA. He said that the IRA... and this was in 1956... had gone communist, that they were planning revolution, and that there would be blood on the streets. He was predicting all this. Now, I had no knowledge whatsoever of Irish history, and indeed not much of *any* history. I had grown up in the Shankill, gone to a local school, left it when I was fourteen, and I knew absolutely nothing about history. So I didn't know what to make of all this, but the people at the meeting, who were a lot older than I was, didn't seem to be impressed with it. I suspect that they had heard it all before, and they knew where sectarianism led to, and it just didn't mean anything to them. But the questions he raised remained with me. Is the IRA communist? Is this a revolutionary situation that was being deliberately created? I was left with that questioning for a long time, and it had an influence, in that I did start studying, and ended up going to university, and, indeed, I was the first person in our family to do that.

Divis Street in 1964 has been mentioned, and that was important for me too because it appeared from a Unionist/Loyalist perspective to be a fulfilment of what this man said at our meeting. That it was part of a campaign of violence which will eventually become a full-blown revolution. It left me with many questions. When the Civil Rights

movement came along it was dismissed as a communist plot. Now, when I look back on it that seems crazy, but that was what we were told. And that this was a further part of the same revolutionary ideology of the IRA. And when I started going to Paisley's church he was saying something similar. Actually at one point I was so worried about these threats and warnings I joined the Unionist Party. And while I was at university I joined the UDR part-time, and was working in the Royal Victoria Hospital as a porter. And while I was there another UDR man was shot dead in the hospital grounds.

So these were difficult times for me, I had a lot of questions. I actually had some sympathy with the civil rights demands. I thought: why can we *not* have civil rights for everybody, treat everybody the same? Over time I began to study and took a particular interest in republicanism and unionism. And finally I ended up meeting leading republicans, like Sean Garland and Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, I had long talks with him. And of course I met Tom Hartley and Jim Gibney and had many conversations with them. That was a long process, and a difficult process because I had *no* history, virtually no British history or even Ulster history, except what I heard on the streets.

Getting to know such people I got new insights: they were people like ourselves. I then began studying O-levels, A-levels, university, although much of that wasn't really relevant. All that I learnt came from my own reading. And at the time I was talking to Tom Hartley and Jim Gibney I believed that they were moving to something constructive, and I was convinced of that, whereas Unionists were denying all that. And for me it wasn't just a case of meeting republicans, I had to get to know Catholics. In fact, I *had* met Catholics: my father had a wee shop and it did business up around the Falls Road, but we never talked about politics or anything contentious, so you didn't really *know* them. So I ended up speaking in St Peter's church in Drogheda, where they have the head of Oliver Plunkett. I wondered what to speak about so I talked about Protestant martyrs and that type of thing. The whole complex thing had to be worked out.

I went to university and met John Morrow, he was a chaplain there. And I desperately wanted to talk to somebody like him who knew about ecumenism, because we had been told that ecumenism was part of the so-called 'plot' to undermine Protestant Ulster – and it was called 'Protestant Ulster'. And some of the people I knew said, specifically, that Catholics should *not* have civil rights, which I couldn't understand, and didn't agree with. I followed that up by setting up a group in County Louth, the Meath Peace Group, where the fact of me going down South, meeting

Southern Irish people, meeting Catholics, meeting republicans, changed my perspective: that they were people like us only our ideas were different. For ten years I chaired this group, along with Julitta Clancy, and we had everybody there: republicans, unionists, Orangemen, UDR men, you name it – and there was a lot of open interaction; it was a wonderful experience. Every meeting was dynamic and there were never any fall-outs. Apart from one UDR man who broke down as a result of what had happened to him – but that was understandable. And I came to the view that there is a legitimacy about unionism, a legitimacy about nationalism, and a legitimacy about republicanism, and we have to get to understand them. For a time I became leader of the New Ireland group; my idea of a new Ireland was a situation where we respected and understood each other, and worked together for the common good. But the group then changed their constitution so that it was a 32-county Ireland, and I couldn't take that and had to resign. I addressed the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, and found that really rewarding. So, as I have said, I had tried hard to get to know nationalists and republicans, and I *did* get to know them, and, indeed, I feel very much at home with them. Anyway, that's me, and that's my relationship with today's topic.

Sean O'Hare: I might as well tell my own story, of how I ended up sitting here, and what it was like growing up in a Catholic nationalist area. I was born in Beechmount in Amcomri Street – the name stands for 'American Committee for Relief in Ireland'. My grandfather was a soldier home on leave when he was burned out of his house between the Shankill and the Falls. The American Committee for Relief in Ireland then built this street, but there wasn't enough houses so names were put into a hat and we were lucky to get one of them. But that coloured my political upbringing. We then moved to Ballymurphy when I was about seven years old. My father had been imprisoned during the war, interned, for five years. In Ballymurphy, in our street there were three ex-IRA prisoners, and four ex-British servicemen.

The impression that I had in the fifties and when I was just going into my teens, was that the republicans were a defeated people. They only whispered to each other, whereas the ex-British soldiers spoke openly in the street about living conditions, and they fought for people's rights, whereas the republicans just felt defeated. I'll give you an example of what it was like in nationalist housing estates. The Belfast Corporation built the houses and the people were content to get the houses, they thought this was great. This was probably the first estate built, and it was a case of: never mind all that republicanism, they're giving us houses to live in, we should be content. I think at that

stage the nationalist population in Belfast were accepting of the Northern Ireland state, although I wasn't, but it seemed the majority were. I wrote 'Up the IRA' on the wall and there was absolute ructions! I was only a kid but the other mothers were down to my mother's door, demanding: you'd better talk to that wee lad! That was the attitude.

But the Corporation built the houses, and to give you an idea of the social attitudes... there was a woman from City Hall called Mrs Dunlop, and she used to do lightning raids on the houses. Just came and rapped your door and inspected your house. She could have told you to get the grass cut in the garden, or paint that wall... And the people were terrorised. We'd have been playing in the street as kids and somebody would have shouted: 'Dunlop's coming!' And everyone had to run into their houses and tidy it up. The attitude was that Catholics didn't know exactly know how to live in these new houses, they had been that busy living in hovels before that. But then she came to this man's house, who was a leading trade unionist and had been in the Royal Air Force during the war. She came to his door, and he said: "Have you an appointment?" She said, "No." And he said, "Well, I am renting this property, and you're quite welcome to come in, but you need to inform me beforehand, so just take yourself off." And that broke the whole thing, that was the end of it. But it gives you an idea of the attitude of the people who were just accepting their lot.

Anyway, just to go on to 1964 which was a big turning-point with the riots in Divis Street. The big thing about it was that before that, at football matches and such like, people would have threw a couple of stones at the RUC and then ran away up the entries and into a house. In '64, however, the people came out after the flag was taken from the window in the republican headquarters and they pulled up the gratings, which were made of cast iron, and smashed them up, and then when the police charged, they charged back. The big difference in '64 was that the police turned and ran! And the crowd drove them right back to the barracks.

When I got to the age of sixteen/seventeen I decided to join the republican movement. I joined a branch called the Greater Ballymurphy branch – it was Whiterock, Ballymurphy, Turf Lodge – and I think we had only seven members, all teenagers. Joe McCann was the 'chairman', for want of a better term, of the branch. Anyway, that's how many people were in the movement in that large area. There were probably older men who were half in and half out, as is the case in all movements – they kind of rest on their laurels, they turn up when they need to turn up. But of the active ones there were only seven of us. That was '64/'65, and in '65 I went off to London

and came back in '69, met up with Joe McCann again, and we were 'managers' of different areas of the republican movement. We were also members of the Belfast management team that looked after *all* the areas.

And at that time we thought we were part of a left-wing world-wide revolution that was going on, and we in Belfast did think that we were in the vanguard of this revolution. It's hard to believe now that back then we thought that within twenty years the whole world would be socialist; that was the feeling among young people. The older people probably had more sense, but we believed that at the time. People talk of the 'Marxist' IRA but we just thought we were socialists, it wasn't any great Marxist philosophy or anything like that. And you have to remember, those of us sitting here, fifty years ago we were all very young men, and as I was saying earlier, in those days the state of Northern Ireland itself was only fifty years old. So when we're looking back today, we are looking back at the same space in time, as we in 1969 were looking back to 1920.

Joe was a very charismatic leader, probably the most charismatic leader of our generation. The last time I saw him was December 1971, I went to meet him and Sean Curry in a pub called 'The Hound of Ulster' in Omeath, that's the last time I saw him. When Joe was killed I was in Cage 9 of Long Kesh with a lot of other friends and comrades of Joe, like Sean Flynn, 'Crazywave', Harry McDermott, Joe McGuinness and Joe McGuigan, all of that generation. And when the news came on that a leading Official had been killed in the Markets area we thought it was Bobby McKnight, for we didn't know that Joe McCann was back in Belfast. We discovered later on that day that it was Joe and it went down very badly in the cage among our people.

I think that might do me and I am hoping people will ask me questions, which I am quite willing to answer, regarding the activities, attitudes and beliefs within the republican movement at that time.

Deirdre Mac Bride: Thank you, Sean, for sharing that. At this point we will open the discussion to the floor. Anyone?

Pádraig Yeates: I was in a completely different environment. I was working in England, Scotland and Wales, and Dublin. I didn't know anyone in the movement, apart from a couple of people; I knew Frank Drivers, who went with the Provos at the time of the split. But he was regarded as quite radical, and he had been around since the Civil War. But most of the people I knew who went with the Provisional movement

were much older. Anyone I knew tended to be automatically socialist, automatically believe that this was the future, and in twenty years the whole world would be socialist. And we compared ourselves with places like Vietnam, or the resistance movement in Europe during the Second World War. But we were a very disparate movement, very small.

I will give you an example. When I joined the movement in Birmingham, I joined a craobh which had less than a dozen people in it, in a city of a million of whom 110,000 were born in Ireland. And a year later when I was recruited into the IRA I had to go to London to be sworn in because there wasn't another member in the West Midlands, and the nearest unit to me was in Manchester. So between Manchester in the north-west and London in the south-east there was literally only one member of the IRA for about six months. I am just trying to explain how desperately small the movement was, and how disparate it was. In Dublin it was the same, you had very traditional people, and we even had a former member of the Waffen SS, who was a member of Sinn Féin in Dublin. We didn't know he had been in the Waffen SS at the time. In fairness to this man, he had been in the Hitler Youth Division and the Germans had recruited people from everywhere, because they were so desperate for people to go and get themselves killed trying to stop the Russians, the Americans or whoever. But that's a digression: I am just trying to explain the range of people who were there.

I think it is interesting that both Tom and Sean have mentioned Divis Street. I came across documentation relating to the RUC which showed that in 1964, when Bill Craig told Sir Albert Kennedy, the Director General of the RUC, to go into Divis Street, Kennedy actually got back to him and said: hold on, I don't think this is a good idea. Craig said: you have to go in because these banners and flags are inflaming Unionists, who could get out of control and do all sorts of desperate things if you don't go in and get it. And Kennedy said: no, the only person who is complaining is Paisley. And Kennedy said: ... and this is in the documentation in PRONI... "I would rather not; it would be much easier to stop Ian Paisley going into Divis Street, than it would be to go into Divis Street and remove those flags." And he was very prophetic. And the interesting thing is that Craig didn't reply to him, he got his personal secretary to reply, and the personal secretary said to Kennedy: how dare you question an order from the minister (in those days the minister had direct operational control of the RUC), never do it again. The implication was that if you do, you will be sacked. And it strikes me, looking at the history of that period, I am not in any way anti-Unionist – I am not that

keen on a United Ireland either, and certainly not in the foreseeable future until we sort out a lot of other things – but it seems to me there was almost a blindness there among unionists, particularly leading unionists, that they were heading down a death-ride path, and they had an incapacity to see where their actions were taking them.

And Tom is absolutely right, there was an unwillingness to heal, to listen to the other side, because in 1969 people didn't want to hear what the 'old fogeys' were saying, they didn't want to hear what people who had been in prison in the Forties were saying, because they had no connection with them, beyond the fact that they had both been members of the same tradition historically, but no connection with them whatsoever: they would rather get rid of them, these people are standing in the way. That was reflective of the view in England, Scotland, Wales, also in Dublin, and I wonder how far it was the view elsewhere. I can understand what both Tom and Sean were saying.

Fergus Whelan: I agree with what Sean said that we thought we were part of a world revolution at that time. First the Vietnam war was happening. As well as that there was a lot of Civil Rights activity and rioting in America, there was the student revolt in France, and for young people it looked like the whole world was moving towards revolution. In Dublin there was the Communist Party, the Connolly Youth Movement, the Young Socialists, and the Republican movement, and they would be on an anti-Vietnam War march one Saturday, or a housing march or demonstration the next. So it was easy to see how you could feel yourself part of a world movement. And another thing, about the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association being a communist conspiracy: well-known communist Betty Sinclair was one of the most prominent members of it, so it was easy to point at the Civil Rights movement and say it is a communist conspiracy. I had hoped that it *was*, at the time!

Jim Goodman: The difficulty for the Official Republican movement in the late seventies was denying being communist. All branches were told to promote friendship societies for Cuba, for the GDR – the German Democratic Republic. I got into an argument one time with a Provisional guy and I said: "How can you accuse us of being communist?"... and yet I was wearing a GDR badge at the time! He said: "Youse are communists, and that's it!" But that was the difficulty; we were promoting these friendship societies.

Mary McMillan: My point is more a structural point than a question. Personal

narratives are very important. I think the energising and politicising moment of '64 that both Sean and Tom referred to was extremely important. I also think there was a lost opportunity between '64 and what happened next in Northern Ireland politics, for then we all kind of fast-forward to 1969. But I think in terms of looking at the whole politicisation of the IRA, and Sinn Féin, in the aftermath of the failed Fifties campaign, there is a central paradox there. And it is that at the one time you are trying to politicise a membership and at the same time you are operating within a hierarchy, an army command organisation. And armies do not promote critical thinking. Armies give you a 'lino correcto', which was a phrase most people who have been around the republican movement in Belfast will actually understand, and a 'lino correcto' is actually a *depoliticising* obstacle to genuine critical engagement with social issues. Anyway, this is more an observation in terms of understanding that period.

Jim Smyth: The use of the term Marxist up to '72, and I think the point is well made, that it wasn't Marxist in any coherent sense. But '72 was a turning point, and you get Sean Garland talking of building the revolutionary party, and I think there was a serious shift Left which begins in 1972. In 1974/5 the Official Compound, Compound 21, one of the huts was bedecked with the red star and the hammer and sickle, so they were in no doubt about their political orientation. But a certain man, I will not name him, he was from the fifties generation, a very senior figure in the Official republican movement... I read a letter that he sent, around about 1976, and I think it was quite instructive, in that he referred to one Karl Marx, but he spelt it 'Carl'!

Martin Connolly: Just one general observation. The period '62 to '72, if you slice it up into the last three years, '70 to '72, quite a lot happened there, which prolonged things, made things worse. You had the Curfew in '70; in '71 you had Internment, and in '72 you had 'Bloody Sunday', and that evolved into the horrible year that it became, with the most deaths in the conflict. So those last few years obviously had a major impact on republican thinking, Official or whatever, I would suggest.

Roy Garland: On the question of Divis Street I got quite friendly with Art McMillan, the brother of Billy McMillan, and he gave me a picture of his brother in the office where the flag was which was causing all the trouble. And he was beside a banner which read: "And let the Orange Lily be your badge my patriot brother. It is the everlasting Green for me, and us for one another." There was no discusion in those days between

the communities, and I think that was a mistake. At that time I also saw one fella striding past the City Hall and he was going to lead his people up Divis Street, and some years later I was at an evangelical meeting down York Street and I saw him again, and I said: "Was that you I saw?" And he said: "Yes, I got six months in jail for that!"

Sean O'Hare: Just in response to some of the comments. There was also, when debating with people in the seventies, a denial that there was an Official IRA. This was the biggest bit of nonsense. We had spokespersons on TV saying we know nothing about the Official IRA, there is no Official IRA... And every time a bomb went off, the TV people just wheeled one of our people, or from the Republican Clubs, out to condemn it, so the media could say: oh, there's a Catholic condemning them. We let ourselves be used that way, and lost an awful lot of support in denying that there was an Official RA, when everybody knew there was.

Just on Mary saying about the lost opportunity. Before 1960 I think the nationalist people were in acceptance of the northern state, not loving it or anything like that but accepting it: this is our lot and we need to make the best of it. And not many younger people nowadays would realise that in 1969 the MP for the Falls area was a member of the Northern Ireland Labour Party, Paddy Devlin. He was an ex-IRA man, but still he was in the Northern Ireland Labour Party. I was in England at the time. And Harry Donaghy's father was a councillor for the Northern Ireland Labour Party. But the Unionists were so entrenched and so bigoted that they would not avail of the opportunity to work with such people. But, no, they were all just nationalists, it didn't matter about them. And that opportunity was missed.

On the point about Long Kesh and the star – they also had berets with the red star on them. But the main person who was more or less behind that is now very much into religion. Yet he was the one who had people marching up and down with red stars.

Tom Hartley: Could I just add to the complexity about the Officials. One of my first meetings on Vietnam was held in the Communist Party headquarters on Albertbridge Road, and that must have been in the early sixties. And my generation and the people that I met with, and engaged with, were the generation of Algeria, South Africa, Palestine, in fact we were all affected by those global events, the North American Civil Rights movement, all of that impacted. And I remember in the early seventies we started to read people like Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon, so in that sense there is a complexity to the politics of the time that goes beyond the labels and is a residue of

the environment that we grew up in in the 1960s , and which we carried then into our own politics of the seventies and eighties. We were rooted in what we would call anti-imperialism and we very much identified with that.

Deirdre Mac Bride: Before I bring Brian in it strikes me... Roy talked about the Percy Street church and this minister coming along... Paisley styled himself in the USA as the international man of the far right. And at the same time you had this thing within the Catholic Church which was a very deep anti-Communism. And what I am hearing you all talk about is young people being the 'young Turks' of your day, and you were picking up the radical ideas of the day which were internationalist ideas. Well, there was *another* set of internationalist ideas about, which was anti-Communism and the far right. Now, was that also playing into Unionism, for Paisley was waiting in the wings to become the man of the future? And 1966 was the opportunity he used.

Brian Hanley: Tom raised a lot of things there. Nationalists in Belfast were left behind in the 1920s, and even what nationalists in the Six-Counties thought would save them – the Boundary Commission – up to 1925 people in Derry city, Fermanagh, Newry, South Armagh, all believed that they would be part of the Free State. But Belfast could *never* be part of the Free State under the Boundary Commission. So Belfast nationalists were gone. What is striking is that this folk memory of being abandoned, and also the pogroms, doesn't seem to have influenced the republican movement in the rest of Ireland in the same way. For republicans in Kerry it was Ballyseedy† and the executions‡ and so on, not what is happening in Belfast. In 1934 there is an article in

† March 1923 saw a series of notorious incidents in County Kerry, where 23 Republican prisoners were killed in the field in a period of just four weeks. Five Free State soldiers had been killed by a booby trap bomb while searching a Republican dugout at the village of Knocknagoshel, on 6 March. The next day, the local Free State commander authorised the use of Republican prisoners to "clear mined roads", justifying the measure as "the only alternative left to us to prevent the wholesale slaughter of our men". That night, 6/7 March, nine Republican prisoners who had previously had their bones broken with hammers, were taken from Ballymullen Barracks in Tralee to Ballyseedy crossroads and tied to a land mine which was detonated, after which the survivors were machine-gunned. This was followed by a series of similar incidents with mines within 24 hours. Five Republican prisoners were blown up with another landmine at Countess Bridge near Killarney and four in the same manner at Cahersiveen. Another Republican prisoner, was taken to Ballyseedy woods by National Army troops and shot dead. On 28 March, five IRA men, captured in an attack on Cahersiveen on 5 March, were officially executed in Tralee. Another, captured the same day, was summarily shot and killed. [wikipedia]

‡ During the Civil War the Free State government carried out 81 official executions, over three times more than the number of IRA volunteers executed by the British during the 1919-21 conflict.

An Phoblacht and the headline is 'Who let the North down?' And the big answer is that the North let itself down. And it is an article by a republican and it is basically saying that when Parnell was under pressure Belfast nationalists supported the anti-Parnellites; when in 1918 we had a vote for Sinn Féin they voted for Joe Devlin; in 1922 they all joined the Free State Army. That was the perception, although there is some truth in it.

Southern republicans and northern republicans, particularly Belfast republicans, had different experiences. Now, I have to say that loyalists remember 1920-22 in their folk memory too, and of course they see it completely differently, and we have the anniversaries of Dunmanway† and Altnaveigh‡ coming up, which loyalists will argue that it proves our point of why *we* needed to be so bad because *they* were going to be so bad to us. And it is striking how those memories linger.

In the current debate about a United Ireland, I have heard that – and I would like to believe that – an all-Ireland health service will trump flags and emblems. But the people I speak to are far more concerned with flags and emblems and identity than they are about economics. The memory of these things looms large, which means that young people who weren't around in 1970-72 get ferociously angry about what happened back then. And why people in 1970 were still angry about 1922. And all the people here were politicised, to a greater or lesser extent, young people. Of course beyond that there is the rest of society, who are *not* politicised, but they will still react to these events: they react to the burning of Bombay Street, they react to the bombings in 1972, and so on. And what you had in Belfast, which you eventually got maybe in the rest of the North, was that the republican movement in Belfast after 1969 mushroomed, and small numbers suddenly became quite big numbers, and most of those young people who joined had no historical background in either republicanism or in those kind of debates.

It might annoy people for me to say this, but the average young person in 1968 was *not* going to talk about the 'May events ' in Paris, to some of them that was the year when Man United won the European cup. For huge amounts of people the student riots in Paris were a case of: "Yes, that's interesting", but only that. Same with the Civil Rights struggle in America: "Yes, that's interesting." But these events are not defining

† In April 1922 the IRA murdered thirteen Protestants in West Cork, in what became known as the 'Dunmanway massacre'

‡ In June 1922 thirty IRA men from Co. Louth crossed the border to attack the community of Alnaveigh, near Newry. Five men and one woman, all Protestants, were murdered and a dozen properties were burned down or bombed. The killings became known as the Altnaveigh Massacre.

them the way a young activist in Dublin was being defined by them. Or even a young activist in Belfast. But after '69 you have got thousands of young people in the North who are joining this movement – and they are picking up bits and pieces probably – but it consumes them. And that is why everybody speaks of the importance of their time in jail when there is time to think and come to different conclusions.

Your point is dead right; the trouble about the 'Marxist' label is that that's like saying you are a 'Christian'. Everyone in this room could say that they were Marxist, and everyone would all disagree completely with each other as to what that means. But when used in history books, or even more in television programes to explain it, it becomes more problematic. Peter Taylor had a line in one of his documentaries: "The IRA had become Marxists; they had given up the gun for fishing rods." It's a good line, but what the Hell does that mean to anybody watching? Oh yes, they mustn't have believed in guns then. I think many of these changes might have happened but they were accelerated then by the split. The more people on the Provisional side said, "You are Godless Communists", the more people on the Official side said: "Yeah, that's what we are. The Soviet Union is supposed to be bad? Well, it can't be all that bad if it is giving guns to people in South Africa, or Zimbabwe; we want guns from it as well." And there were people who were genuine.

You mention Sean Garland's speech, and I think that is a very significant speech, and Garland was definitely one who was influenced by Marxism. But in 1972 Garland was influenced by Trotskyism, and nobody would define Garland as a Trotskyist! All these ideas were out there and people were taking bits and pieces from them, and I am struck by people talking about Joe McCann being a member of a lay order, and so on. Marxist, socialist, Catholic, reactionary – actually ordinary people are a mixture of all sorts of things, even politicised people.

But what happened in Belfast transformed things, and then what happened in the republican movement in the rest of Ireland either followed suit as the violence got worse. You see places like Tyrone, for example, staying largely Official until 1972, or parts of Armagh and so on. But then things accelerate and the movement splits, more splits happen, and the bitterness, and the memory. I cannot say how I would react if a family member was shot, so it is perfectly understandable why people hate each other. And what was happening in the North, and which people were responding to and taking on things which were partly political and partly genuine, but I do think that the phrase that Sinn Féin's Declan Kearney has used, 'uncomfortable conversations', is useful

here, for I think we need to have uncomfortable conversations about all these things. We need to hear from loyalists, for example, how they understand the impact of the McMahon family murders† on the nationalist community. And then explore what is burned into the unionist community's memory as well.‡

Because I do think there is a new discussion about a United Ireland, but what does it actually mean to people when they think about that idea: does it mean an all-Ireland health service? Or does it mean that we finally get to stick our flag on top of City Hall? Having discussions with students in the South has been very interesting for me. They haven't been consumed by the economics at all, it always comes back to the symbols, and the significance of that to people emotionally. Because people do at the end of the day react to events emotionally.

Tom Hartley: The memory, I wouldn't describe it as 'folk memory', let me explain why. There were people in Bombay Street in 1969 whose grannies were telling them about the events in Bombay Street in 1920. So it was a *living* experience, and the experience of growing up in a nationalist community was a living experience, it was more than just befuddled politics, it was in the lives of people, people suffered in all sorts of ways. So if you think about what I call the infrastructure of discrimination aimed at the Catholic population. At the time if you were a Catholic teacher, and if you wanted a job you couldn't get a job in the public sector because you had to take an oath, and if you were a bit sort of staunch you wouldn't take the oath. So there were real implications in terms of people's lives, people's experience.

And I agree with Sean, I think it's a very complex mix, that the northern Catholic population, like my parents, would have said: let's get on with life, we have to live and get work; but it's out of a sense of powerlessness – that the northern state exists and they have to exist within it. But at the same time underneath... and I suppose the core

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† In what was believed to have been a reprisal for the IRA's killing of two policemen the day before, on 24 March 1922 six Catholic men were shot dead at the home of the McMahon family in Belfast. It was suspected that members of the Ulster Special Constabulary carried out the murders.

‡ Tragically, during the more recent Troubles, multiple-victim atrocities were to be a hallmark of the legacy bequeathed by republicans, loyalists, and state forces, and a new litany of names has been 'burned into' the lived memories of both communities: Ballymurphy, McGurks, Bloody Sunday, Aldershot, Abercorn, Springhill, Bloody Friday, Claudy, Dublin/Monaghan, Guildford, Birmingham, Miami Showband, Kingsmill, La Mon, Warrenpoint, Droppin Well, Darkley, Enniskillen, Ballygawley, Teebane, Ormeau Road, Warrington, Loughinisland, Shankill Road, Greysteel, Omagh... and many, many others.

question that I come to, and when I address it, I just don't mean any particular section of the leadership: first of all, did the republican leadership have *no* sense of this cauldron bubbling underneath? So that when it burst out in '69 they were unprepared. And I suspect that *nobody* saw it coming. But I think that's a comment on the political leadership of the time. Now, it might be a difficult question to answer but what it says is that they were unprepared for the events that they were participating in, and of course you can't always *see* those events, but it seems to me they were blind to it. And *why* were they blind to it is a question we maybe can't answer today, but it does need answered. And I suspect that once the situation got out of control then the personalities kicked in, all over the place. There's personalities here, there and everywhere, and then that is part of the conditions that leads to the split.

Roy Garland: Could I say just briefly, the person who announced, in the fifties, about the communism in the IRA, ten years later called loyalists communists, and tried to condemn them for that. And it was a serious obstruction to that element within loyalism which went to great lengths in talking to the IRA and all the rest of it. That engagement, as far as I can see, has greatly declined, but that was part of it. Calling them communists was the worst thing you could do from the unionist perspective.

Brian Hanley: Tom, you're absolutely right. By 'folk memory' I didn't mean a false memory, what I meant was that this is the experience of the community, which didn't exist in Cork or in Dublin. So the way that people in Dublin remember the War of Independence, or the people in Cork remember it, is very different from the way Belfast nationalists remember it. And it is only recently that historians have been looking at the different groups in Belfast, the republican movement in 1922, because there were no *Guerilla days in Belfast*, no *My fight for Irish freedom in Belfast.* I think the republican movement did have, in many ways, a southern perspective, even when it was upset going into Partition. I think they thought the main battleground would be north and south but that the south would be very important.

Cathal Goulding said things publicly in April 1969, and it's in the *Irish News*. There had been clashes in Derry in April during which Samuel Devenny was assaulted by RUC officers (and subsequently died). The Civil Rights Association called for solidarity demonstrations; the Republican movement said, "Cause as much trouble across the North, get the police out of Derry, because the reinforcement are going there." And there's post-offices and so on fire-bombed in Belfast. And Goulding is

asked by the *Irish Times* or the *Irish News* a couple of days later what's all this about, and he said: "Well, we can either sit back and allow our people to be slaughtered or not, and we are not going to allow our people to be slaughtered." That does give the impression that the republican movement were aware, to some extent, or prepared to some extent, to do something. Now, there is so much in the post-split arguments about this, that and the other, and I don't know the ins and outs. But I do think that the history of republicanism since the beginning of the Troubles has a northern accent. If you talk to people about the IRA or Sinn Féin now they assume it is to do with the North. Whereas I think that prior to 1969 people assumed that republicanism was about something else. The ones who were really immersed in it thought it's about the Treaty and the Civil War, which loomed huge for republicans from the 26-counties. And again when you talk about 'the North', Derry is different from Belfast, and north and south are also different.

Sean O'Hare: When the Civil Rights idea was coming about you had people like Greaves in England, and communists in Dublin, and the belief was that the Civil Rights movement would eventually bring down the northern state. They believed that the republican movement could carry a section of nationalists into the civil rights, and the communist party believed it could bring in a section of the Protestant working class... and if you lived in Belfast you knew that that wouldn't happen. But people from the outside were saying: "Well, the communists are all active trade union officials, so therefore they must have influence among the Protestant working class", but the Protestant people voted for communists to represent them on trade union issues but *not* for their politics. In 1970 or '71, in the first elections held after '69 Jimmy Stewart only got 123 votes in Belfast. But there was loads of stuff people were *wishing* was right, instead of having a debate into it in depth, they just assumed: this is what'll happen.

I heard people saying that some were saying: what we demand is British rights for British citizens. If you had've said that at a civil rights meeting you'd have got a slap across the head! But that's what people are saying now. On the Coalisland-Dungannon march they sang 'A Nation Once Again' when they finished! But people are rewriting it to say: no, they were asking for British rights for British citizens. Gerry Fitt might have said it in Westminister to embarrass them. But people in the street would never have said that. And I can see that people are simply rewriting things.

Fergus Whelan: A big difference between the Belfast IRA and the southern IRA, is

if you look at the Spanish Civil War, the vast majority of IRA men from the south of Ireland who fought in Spain fought against Franco.There were eight volunteers from Belfast dismissed for going to Spain: four of them went to fight *for* Franco. Why was that? I think the Blueshirts† were a big, big issue for the IRA in the thirties, forties, and so on, and the bête noire of the republicans in the south was Eoin O'Duffy‡. On the other hand, for the Belfast IRA a lot of them had fought with the Free State on the same side as O'Duffy and had never had that conflict. And eventually when Sean McCaughey becomes Chief of Staff of the IRA he tried to recuit O'Duffy into the IRA, so I just think that whole experience of the Blueshirts and the Republican Congress didn't happen up here.

Sean O'Hare: My father, who was far from being a fascist or a Blueshirt, had a great word for O'Duffy; the old Belfast IRA great respect for him. He was sent up by GHQ to coordinate with the Belfast IRA, and he helped arm them and defended their position in Dublin. So O'Duffy was well thought about here. O'Duffy's Irish Brigade in Spain was called the 'rosary brigade'!

Áine McCann then relayed the following message which had arrived on her laptop:

Gerry Adams: Well done, it is great to hear all this getting discussed. Well done to

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† In February 1932, when Fianna Fáil was elected to lead the Irish Free State government it suspended the Public Safety Act, lifting the ban on a number of organisations including the IRA. The IRA and many released prisoners began a campaign of unrelenting hostility against those associated with the former Cumann na nGaedheal government. Frank Ryan, active in both the Republican Congress and the IRA, declared "as long as we have fists and boots, there will be no free speech for traitors". There were many cases of intimidation, attacks on persons, and the breaking-up of Cumann na nGaedheal political meetings in the coming months. In response, National Army Commandant Ned Cronin founded the Army Comrades Association (ACA) in Dublin in August, 1932, and began to provide security at Cumann na nGaedheal events. This led to several serious clashes between the IRA and the ACA. In April 1933, the ACA began wearing the distinctive blueshirt uniform.

‡ Eoin O'Duffy had been a guerrilla leader in the IRA in the War of Independence, a National Army general in the Civil War, and Garda Síochána police commissioner from 1922 to 1933. When President Éamon de Valera dismissed O'Duffy he was offered and accepted leadership of the ACA and renamed it the National Guard. He re-modelled the organisation, adopting elements of European fascism, such as the straight-arm Roman salute, the wearing of uniforms and huge rallies. O'Duffy was an admirer of Mussolini, and the Blueshirts adopted corporatism as a chief political aim. However, many historians do not consider the Blueshirts a strictly fascist organisation. Some former members went on to fight for the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War after the organisation had been dissolved.

Joe's family and friends, especially Anne, for organising events in his memory. Joe was an outstanding activist and leader. The 1969 split was a disaster, as was the violence which accompanied this and subsequent splits. Well done to all the contributors. It was good that we take time to understand and learn all the lessons of 1962 to 1972 . Go raibh míla maith agaibh.

Deirdre Mac Bride:I am now going to ask Brian, Sean and Tom to give us their reflections and thoughts as to where we go next. And just to give you Roy Garland's apologies, he as had to go on.

Sean O'Hare: We have started more debates here than we have finished. I think that this dialogue should be carried on, with emphasis on the Civil Rights period, and an examination of the Civil Rights movement: what it meant and the mistakes that it made. We are here to talk about the mistakes we *all* made, as well as the contributions that we all made. But I think it would be a tragedy if we didn't go into the whole thing about the split, the weapons in '69, all these topics that are kind of a no-no at the minute. And we assume that the bitterness and hatred has more or less gone, we left that to fanatics. However, I do not think that is the case. I think that this dialogue, if Messines don't do it, somebody should do it, and the future of the island has to be discussed as well. What do we all believe... and it should not be a case of "don't mention that, don't mention the other, don't mention a United Ireland." We have to begin the discussions on that and we have to try and bring the unionist population into that discussion. Hopefully this is the beginning of something as far as I can see.

Tom Hartley: I would be lucky enough in my life to have been engaging in conversations with, I suppose at the start unionist clerics, and many unionists down the years, and also I have talked to Sean and Harry and Pádraig there, and I think there is a sense of reaching a point in our lives when we can look back, where we can discuss... really you're starting to discuss the difficult issues, and starting to try and make sense of the Past. Because the Past is a very complex and layered space. And I would always argue that wisdom is thrust on you, you're not born with it. And to try and understand the Past, and particularly to understand the 1960s and going into the 1970s, and what happened to our society. And the question I would often ask myself: what were the political conditions, the underlying tensions in society, that drove thousands of young people into the activities during the 1970s and 80s? That didn't happen out of nowhere, there was a reason for it, and we have to explore what are those reasons, and try and

do it with a sense that we continue to engage with one another. And try and see the humanity in each other, try and see that people have their own sense of themselves which bring meaning to their lives, and we have to try and find that. So I do think that there needs to be a process of dialogue, a discourse about the complexity of history.

I always like to remind republicans that the first time I ever heard the term 'army council' was when I was reading the history of Cromwell's New Model Army, and there was an 'army council' formed of soldiers. And I only say that because when you look at the history of this island it is much more layered and complex, and also difficult at times. And the challenge for all of us in this room is how do we engage in that and maintain our links and maintain our friendships and see the different perspectives, and then try and move forward politically, because I think people want to do that. So there is room for discourse around not just the Past, but the Future, and as human beings we live in the Past, the Present and the Future all at once, we cannot dislodge one from the other. So we need to find a form of engagement that allows us to communicate with one another, and one of the lessons I learnt in politics, particularly I suppose when you're at the very core of politics, is that politicians and those who are engaged with politicians, need sometimes to *listen to themselves*, and how their own words impact. Not to be listening just to the other, but what is the impact of *their own* words? And I think a project like this is very much a process that we want to be engaged in.

Brian Hanley: I have taken part in a few of these discussions which Harry and others have organised, with loyalists and republicans... people of a certain age and experience are able to sit down and talk to each other; and able to, I won't say go *beyond* what happened in the past, but able to put it into some kind of context where they can relate to each other. But what I worry about, and what I think about, to some extent is how far does that extend to the great numbers of young people in both communities, who don't have any contact with each other other than through labels or slogans. There is a condescending view about Sinn Féin voters in the South that they are too young to remember how bad it was and that is why they vote Sinn Féin. That doesn't explain it. But there is a point that you've not experienced how terrible things were and you have only grown up with maybe a romanticised memory, but it doesn't seem that bad, and if it wasn't that bad why wasn't it sorted out? Why are we still having to deal with this every July or every August or whatever?

And I don't know how you solve that, because as an historian I can always say we all have a experience of shared history and so on, but there are rhetorically violent

debates about things which happened 100 years ago, with people not talking to each other, so debates about things which are in living memory, and where people were hurt by them, in some ways I think the best thing historians can do is explain what happened, and be aware that everybody will have a different view of what exactly happened. And *all* of those views will be valid because people will have experienced it differently. And if we can avoid labels among outselves – speaking as someone who has been called both a 'Stickie' and a 'Provo', for people have assumed on the basis of what I have written that I am one or the other – and to try and explain what happened and to try and put it into context, and then maybe to try and bring in these things that are maybe a little bit problematic would help explain the contradictions.

Like when Tom mentioned Cromwell, in 1933 the republican movement stood candidates in the Stormont elections and they stood against Joe Devlin. And the *Irish News* and the *Derry Journal* and all the main nationalist papers in the North were Nationalist Party papers, and they unleashed a wave of abuse, saying the republicans were usurpers from the South and they should go back there. But the *Irish News* also had an editorial which said, 'Cromwell was the first republican to come to Ireland, and everyone knew what his record against the church was.' And it was a good line, and there was also truth in it. The question is: what *is* republicanism? It means different things in different countries. And in Ireland does it mean that you are really, really anti-British, or does it mean you are really into armed struggle, or does it mean you are really into the United Irishmen? There is a debate: what do we mean by these labels?

But many young people have better things to do. I have got over the fact that the twenty-odd students I teach are not hanging onto my every word, and have probably had a better time the night before than they could have in my class! There is an amazing lack of awareness of some of the events of Irish history, and that can lead people to not knowing that Wolfe Tone was not a Catholic, or assumptions about Unionism or unionists which are based on caricatures, offensive caricatures, and so on. And how do we get younger people into discussions like this? Now I think a public event involving veterans but aimed at younger audiences would get a response, and who knows what they would say. It would be interested to hear if they go beyond 'the Provos thought this' or 'the Sticks thought that' or 'the Loyalists thought this'... But what *did* these people think, they didn't come from Mars, they were practically from the same streets in their communities.

And also I do think there are other issues, not related maybe to the conflict, but

which are increasingly apparent. There's two really. The first issue... I live in Dublin, and it is a normal area, but it is quite clear that a large part of the young people there are part of a criminal sub-section of society. I don't know if anyone saw footage during the week of the young man who was shot in Finglas, I mean there were hundreds of young people at that funeral. And it is clear that among a section of the poorest working-class people, and I know it is the same in the North, it's not politics they're into, and not even any identification with any political group: it's an identification with criminality, and it has attractions and community workers on the ground find it very hard to grapple with it all. And for a lot of young people their heroes are criminals, which they sometimes mix in with political heroes too.

And I have another area of concern which is both North and South and is complicated by the national question, if you want to call it that. During the lock-down and during Covid, for the first time in decades fascist organisations emerged in Dublin and held open rallies and attacked people, which had never happened before... you have to go back to the Blueshirts for people who thought like that. And one thing which Sinn Féin has done is that they have helped hold the line I think in the South in working-class communities to a greater extent in not allowing racism to become respectable.

But as Sinn Féin have become more mainstream there are also gaps opening up among people who are using the rhetoric of the War of Independence, using the rhetoric of Irish history, to actually put forward a far-right agenda. It is a new phenomenon and it is small, and I wouldn't over-estimate it, but it is something I see. With younger people in particular I see the right-wing feedback that they are getting off the Internet and social media, and with the crisis in Ukraine and the question of refugees – the big question of our times really – it becomes something we have to be aware of, and not assume because we're Irish or whatever that we're inured to all that stuff, our history makes us part of the oppressed, so people just don't think like that. I know these are not related to 1969-'70, but for me it is how do you get the next generation, or part of it, to avoid the mistakes of the past without being too patronising about those mistakes, to understand that these things happened, and that they happened to ordinary people, and that a lot of it didn't need to happen.

Fergus Whelan: There was mention there about the New Model Army, and the point that Oliver Cromwell was the first republican. This is exactly the place to make those points, because William Drennan was born here, his father was the minister here, and one of the things that he, on the 31st of January 1774, wrote at the top of a letter to his

sister: “The day that makes tyrants tremble.” That was the date of the execution of Charles I, so he was actually hailing one action of the New Model Army. When Drennan mused about who the greatest men in British history were, he thought William of Orange was the greatest man in British history. And Drennan was the founder of the United Irishmen. So there is a very tight connection between Cromwellian republicans and Irish republicanism.

Sean Murray: First of all I would like to thank the panel, I think it has been a fascinating discussion, and as Sean says hopefully this is the start of a process rather than just a one-off event. Myself and Tom are members of Sinn Féin and have been engaged in an outreach programme to unionists and loyalists; indeed, we have been doing that for twenty, thirty years. But we are *not* engaging with republicans on the same basis, and it is important that we do, and it is important that we learn lessons from the past. Sean also made the point that we have all made mistakes; we have made mistakes as individuals, we have made mistakes corporatively, over the past number of years. And it is important that future generations don’t make the same mistakes. Your point Brian, about the sub-culture, that’s very worrying at the present time, not just in Dublin, it’s in Belfast as well and is growing. And my concern is that with the current economic climate, when we are facing a major cost-of-living crisis, etc, it has all the potential for that class to grow. And I have had this out with some of the cops in the area, saying that there is going to be a rise in criminality, youse need to watch in terms of how you deal with this sort of situation. There are ring-leaders in there, but part of the problem is that they are recruiting ring-leaders to serve their interests. So you have all these problems which are coming at us here, and it is important that republicans... because they see republicans as the enemy, as the only people who have tried to use their influence...because these people are about building empires, these people are about dominating communities and feeding off those communities. So there are the challenges we face in the future.

Sean also made the point that we are facing into a new Ireland, an Ireland where people of all political persuasions feel comfortable. That will only happen if we have those engagements, from every perspective: to break down myths about republicans and republicanism, to reassure unionists that the people who were discriminated against won’t turn round and discriminate against them. Because there is a natural genuine fear there of what will happen in a new Ireland and the consequences for people from that political background. We see what’s happening within political Unionism at

the present time; they're being led by people like Jamie Bryson – and that's not going to end up in a good place, folks. And from our experience, when political Unionism feels disadvantaged or under pressure they take it out on our community. These are all the points we need to look for in the future, hence the need for more engagement, with republicans, but also with every political persuasion, as we look towards the future.

Anne Hargey: I would just like to say that a house divided among itself doesn't stand. It is like a family: everybody has different personalities, different ways of looking at things, favourite colours, favourite food – but at the end of the day you are one unit, you are a family and you learn to work together and put personal egos out of the way. My father had bought me a book for my birthday, it was by Fred Heatley, and was about the United Irishmen. I had a great infatuation with the United Irishmen, particularly Henry Joy McCracken. His sister Mary Ann had lived in the Donegal Pass which was near where I grew up in the Market. I remember one day my mother pointing out to me the house where Mary Ann was meant to have lived – this was oral history handed down, because we were never taught our history in school. My father was from a Protestant unionist background, although he became a Catholic. He taught me most of what he had taught himself about Irish history. I joined the O'Callaghan-Williams Republican Club in Albert Street. This was pre split and the emergence of civil rights movement, which we were encouraged to support and join in the protest marches. I remember asking my father: "What does 'movement' mean?" He said: "Well, a movement is a movement of people, grassroots people, the ordinary people; and the struggle they are involved in is a continual struggle." It is *still* a continual struggle, because mention anything of a republican nature and the media, the establishment, everyone, is just against you, and you're labeled an agitator, a violent person.

When the United Irishmen was formed it was a very radical movement, and it grew out of the Enlightenment, and that very word tells you it is to *enlighten*, not to bring you back to the dark ages. It seems that we still have a lot to learn from that Enlightenment. I have always thought of Irish society as very parochially-minded: we look at our neighbour and we will pick a hole in their coat and make it bigger rather than trying to mend it. I think we have to step back from such attitudes and realise that it's great to be part of a community and it is great to have those values that were instilled in us from our parents, to help and comfort; all these humanitarian feelings that you have, and which makes community life good. When things go wrong people come

together. We saw that during the Troubles, '69 – that brought out the best in people and they helped each other.

I really enjoyed this discussion. I want to thank the McCann family: I really feel for them, the fifty years that they have been denied a father, a brother, a husband, a grandfather – and so many people who were denied that because of Collusion, because of British influence and power. Because they had the power to stop it and they had the power to stop Ian Paisley, the power to stop collusion, but they came in to divide and conquer. And then all the splits, all the factions. But blessed are the peacemakers†, and I think we need to get back to that. I will just finish by saying that I think that so many things could have been prevented but we must not look back, we must look forward, because people in this room can make a difference. You may not think you have that power but every little thing, no matter how small it is, can make a difference.

Jim Goodman: I think we all should admire the McCann family to the hightest esteem. Because as a republican comrade of Joe, I can't accept that the British authorities and the MoD said 'Joe McCann is nothing!' The family will never accept Joe McCann as nothing, and never will we in the republican movement.

Brian Watson: I would just like to make two very quick comments. Regarding Tom's point about going to a meeting of the Communist Party on the Albertbridge Road: My father worked in the Shipyard, a trade unionist, and all my uncles were trade unionists. I remember one day going up the Woodstock Road and he pointed out a cul de sac and said "That's called 'Red Square' ", because of all the members of the Communist Party living there. There was a very big left-wing tradition in Protestant working-class areas. All my family were trade unionists, and a lot of them were in the Labour Party, and some in the Communist Party. In the days of heavy industry, in the Shipyard where my father and grandfather worked, there was a tremendous trade union movement and many activists there. Yes, there was also sectarianism, but let's face it there was sectarianism everywhere. And where did that strong left-wing tradition go; when did we begin to lose that? Because it *has* gone. Is it due to the decline of the trade union movement, or did something else happen that changed that?

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† Sadly, the voices of the peacemakers were not to prevail in 1972, as it proved to be the worst year of the Troubles for fatalities, with nearly 500 people killed. As an indication of the downward spiral into violence and tragedy, the day after Joe McCann's killing the Official IRA, in revenge, shot dead three British soldiers, all of whom, like McCann, were in their twenties, and two of them, like McCann, were married with young children.

A final very quick question. The three gentlemen remaining on the panel used the terms 'republican', 'nationalist', and sometimes you threw in the word 'Catholic' for good measure, as if they are one and the same. It brought me to thinking about a book I read recently, called *Forgetful Remembrance* by the historian Guy Beiner. He made the statement that the defeat of the United Irishmen marked the *end* of Irish Republicanism and the beginning of Irish Nationalism. I found that fascinating, because the two labels are often used interchangeably, but my understanding is that they are entirely polar-opposites. So, gentleman, are you republicans, nationalists, Catholics or what? Every time I meet Tom it is in a Presbyterian establishment, and I pointed this out to him and he said I could comfortably be a Presbyterian but I'd still be a republican. But *we* were the republicans.

Tom Hartley: I remember a conversation with my brother, Peter, and I was saying that as a child I was very quiet, and my brother said: "Quiet! You were the one who was always starting arguments around the table." And I think Sean would know that I carried that into my political life, I was always arguing and fighting with people. And I could never understand why, until one day I was looking at the enlistment papers of my grandfather, David Nelson, who joined the Royal Artillery in 1894, and under religion it said: 'Presbyterian'. And suddenly everything made sense to me!

Anne Hargey: When my late husband Jim was being arrested – it was the mini-Internment before Internment – they came to his family home in East Street in the early morning and were battering on the door. At this Jim's grandfather opened the window and held up his British Army medals and said: "Is this what I fought for? I was fighting against Nazi Germany and fascism, yet what rights have we here?" But think how many people in the Catholic community had people belonging to them who had been in the British Army, who went to fight against fascism, for the freedom of small nations?

Deirdre Mac Bride: I am going to draw this discussion to a close now. I think we should start again where we started today: that is in asking questions. And widening this discussion as far as we can to include *all* the community if we hope to move on. And that will be the job of Harry and Messines. So can I say a thank you again to Brian, Tom and Sean, and also Roy.