

*Reflections on 1969*  
*Lived Experiences & Living history*

*(Discussion 3)*

**The Battle of the Shankill**

11-12 October, 1969

*compiled by*

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*The Fellowship of Messines Association*

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# Introduction

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

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

The *third* discussion was hosted in the offices of the **Greater Shankill ACT Initiative** courtesy of the Project Director **William Mitchell**. The discussion was chaired by **Deirdre Mac Bride**, and two local historians – **Jim McDermott** and **Robert Foster** – each gave a presentation before the discussion was opened up to the thirty individuals present. These individuals represented a wide diversity of political backgrounds and allegiances, many of whom had either been participants in the events under discussion, or witnesses to them. The theme of this third workshop was

***‘The Battle of the Shankill, 11-12 October 1969’***

The wide-ranging discussion which ensued was edited slightly to fit into the space available in this pamphlet.

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

## ***The Battle of the Shankill 11-12 October 1969***

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Welcome everyone. I am glad to see such a good turnout. Just to recap: this is the third in our series of discussions looking at the turbulent events of 1969. Our first discussion focused on how we begin to recall that period. Our second looked at the tragic events of August '69 and the erection of 300 barricades dividing working-class Protestant and Catholic areas of Belfast. The eventual taking down of those barricades, however, was not accompanied by a reduction in community tensions. Indeed, when the Hunt Report was released on 10 October, recommending the disbandment of the B-Specials [auxiliary police force] and the disarming of the RUC, it caused outrage within the Unionist community. And in the Protestant working-class Shankill area of Belfast that anger exploded in an unprecedented and violent engagement between local residents and the RUC and British Army, which left one policeman and two civilians dead, and scores injured. And it is that 'Battle of the Shankill', as it came to be called, which is the subject of our discussion today.

Before we open it up to a general discussion, two speakers will explain the context to the events: Jimmy McDermott, educator and historian, and Bobbie Foster, an historian of the Greater Shankill area. But before they make their presentations I will now hand over to William Mitchell, who is hosting this discussion today, to say a few words.

***In the Shankill... that anger exploded in an unprecedented and violent engagement between local residents and the RUC and British Army.***

[**William Mitchell**] Okay, folks, a warm welcome. In case you don't know this is the central hub of Action for Community Transformation, which is a conflict transformation initiative, working with those with an alignment, or perceived affiliation, to the Ulster Volunteer Force. We see this as our communal hub, from which we organise a significant number of projects, and we also have an additional office in the mid-Ulster region, in Banbridge. We also have a collaboration with EPIC in the Open Doors Peace Forum project, and we have Harry [Donaghy] here, who is an advocate for that project, and we also have a long-established relationship with Harry's own Fellowship of Messines project. Maybe Harry wants to say a few words.

[**Harry Donaghy**] Thanks again, William, for hosting us at the ACT premises on the Shankill Road. This programme of discussions arose out of a number of different interactions, stretching back a good few years. During the time when we were looking at the Decade of Centenaries – 1916, 1921, the Covenant, the Lockout, World War I, etc. – the conversations always got around to the question: what are we going to do when we get to that point in history when it is not our grandparents’ history, it is our *own*? How are we going to deal constructively with the period of 1969 and its impact? I have to say that the discussions held to date, on the ’69 period, have been thought-provoking and extremely interesting, largely because many of the individuals who have been contributing were those who literally lived it. Indeed, they were sometimes front and centre of the events that we have been talking about. And as part of that series of discussions we thought it was important to focus on one of the most momentous events of ’69: the ‘Battle of the Shankill’, which took place right here on the night of 11-12 October. Despite it being seismic at the time, it has almost been forgotten, and yet you could argue that we are still living today with the repercussions of that event and the other momentous events of ’69.

*...what are we going to do when we get to that point in history when it is not our grandparents’ history, it is our own?*

We have been extremely fortunate in being able to call upon individuals like Jimmy, Bobbie, Deirdre, and all of the other guest speakers, to set the scene, set the tone, for these discussions. So I look forward to a good discussion.

[**Jim McDermott**] History is often recalled differently by different people. How politicians see history is often quite different from how those at a street level perceive it. My own background was Catholic nationalist and I took for granted many of the ideas I grew up with, although I was never ever opposed to Protestants. Indeed, I worked for a time in a bar in East Belfast whose clientele were largely Protestant shipyard workers. I got to know them and I liked them very much. But the events of August 1969 gave me the shock of my life. I never understood what was happening. In fact, the politics of the time left me cold. It was only in later years that I began to ask questions: *why* did it happen? *how* did it happen that two sets of people became so polarised – people like the Protestant customers who I used to serve and chat with, and Catholic people like those I grew up with around Clonard Street – and all of whom had so much in common.

The late William ‘Plum’ Smith, in his book about his experiences, puts his finger neatly on one aspect of it. He was born in 1954 and lived in Mountjoy Street. Consequently he was only fifteen when the events of August 1969 happened. He was from one side of the community, and just like his counterparts on the Falls Road, he took common cause with that community. He was asked in later life as to why he got involved in a paramilitary organisation, and he said: ‘It wasn’t so much that I got involved, I was *born* into it.’ The events surrounding his teenage years made his particular political path inevitable.

Plum Smith said that in August 1969 the dominant emotion that he witnessed was fear. I witnessed the same thing. The resort to ‘jungle telephone’, rumours, excitement, wondering where leadership was coming from. Fear of the ‘other’, fear of the unknown. He catches that very well, and really what he said, and I agree with him, you get involved depending on where you live. Where you were born, and what your background has been growing up, will decide an awful lot of your political views, and while I don’t think you are necessarily a prisoner of it either, I think it will be very important on how you think.

Looking at the events of ’69, I am struck by the way that there is a total polarisation of working-class communities. It is a ‘zero-sum’ game: an advantage for one is to the other’s disadvantage, and vice versa. There is no one political measure which can give gratification to both sides. However, after the 17th August things seemed to have settled somewhat. But there had been a background. Terence O’Neill had resigned in April 1968. John McKeague had formed the Shankill Defence Association in May 1969. The Rev. Ian Paisley was gaining a lot of traction, first of all being opposed to O’Neill and now to his cousin James Chichester-Clark, the new Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. The events of August were spectacularly unexpected, including, I suspect, to the participants. And so grave were the consequences, and that all this should be happening in the United Kingdom, the then Labour government felt they had to do something. And Prime Minister Harold Wilson summoned James Chichester-Clark, Brian Faulkner and Robert Porter, along with leading civil servants, over to Downing Street, to speak to his cabinet. The Home Secretary James Callaghan, like Harold Wilson, like the

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majority of the British Labour cabinet of the time, had no knowledge of, and very limited interest in, Northern Ireland. Other events were preoccupying them: the economic situation, and so on. And Callaghan had noted that there had been a Westminster convention by which both main parties had never discussed Northern Ireland very much.

They wouldn't have known how I thought, they wouldn't have known how Plum Smith thought. So when they made their decisions, they were decisions very much mediated through what they considered to be good standards of behaviour for a town like Ipswich or Edinburgh. They wanted, as the Civil Rights movement itself had asked for, British standards for British citizens. When Chichester-Clark went over to London his dread was that Westminster was planning to strip Stormont of all its devolved powers and put not only security but domestic matters back in the hands of Downing Street. The troops had moved in after all. Chichester-Clark surprised the meeting by saying that he thought security should be put in the hands of General Freeland and the British Army. This was a good start; this was an acknowledgement that things had got very difficult to control, but Wilson went much further: he laid out a seven-point plan, which effectively conceded the demands of the Civil Rights movement. He stressed that electoral boundaries would be changed, no more gerrymandering, the 'one man, one vote' issue should be addressed, there should be some sort of ombudsman to look after grievances, and other things. In essence, these were the changes the Civil Rights movement essentially wanted. And Wilson thought that by conceding these he could normalise, as much as possible, Northern Ireland society.

But then, to the horror of the Unionist politicians, Wilson went on TV that night and said that he could see ultimately the phasing out of the B-Specials. Now, it is the sort of thing which to others might seem extremely reasonable, especially if you lived in Bath or Brighton, etc. It didn't, however, sound very reasonable to Protestants/Unionists who had grown up in Northern Ireland. The ordinary person on the Shankill Road, for example, would have been felt that the Civil Rights movement provided an element of provocation, and that concessions to them presented a threat. The Shankill community had already been under severe threat from

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massive and ill-considered redevelopment. Indeed, a community-based account published in an effort to halt this redevelopment was entitled *The Rape and Plunder of the Shankill*. The Shankill area, like other working-class areas in Belfast, had been an extremely close-knit area. If a mother lived in somewhere like Argyle Street and a daughter got married, she tried to get a house in the same street for the family. The bars where people socialised, and the fact that many people worked in the same industries – the shipyard, Mackies and so on – had all provided a continuity, a reassurance. A link with the past, from the time of Partition. But now, with this redevelopment, the Shankill, as a vibrant community, was greatly shrinking in size, and all of the old certainties were slowly being eroded.

***[T]he Shankill... was greatly shrinking in size, and all of the old certainties were slowly being eroded. And to people who already felt their community under threat, here looked like more threats on the horizon.***

And to people who already felt their community under threat, here looked like more threats on the horizon. Their community was getting the blame for recent events, they were seen as the ‘bad’ people, the bogey-men, who started all this. The B-Specials – people they would have known as brothers, fathers, uncles, cousins – were being stood down, seemingly because certain people regarded them as unlawful. To the Shankill, however, most ‘unlawful’ people were those harboured in *other* communities, whose aim was to try and subvert the state. The lack of any real engagement between both communities only served to increase the sense of paranoia, on both sides. And on top of all this people were living through tumultuous times: parades, counter-parades, and heightened emotions.

Northern Ireland Prime Minister Chichester-Clark endeavoured to assuage Protestant fears: the B-Specials might just be confined to barracks, everything will be alright. Brian Faulkner on TV said: let me be crystal clear, the B-Specials will not be stood down. And all the time the Troubles simmered away.

Then, the government stood down the Head of the RUC, Sir Anthony Peacock and replaced him with their preferred man, Sir Arthur Young, whose experience had been in Malaya. Protestants were perturbed: we had a local man, and now this guy comes in who is not local. And the growing belief that their side of the story is not being listened to, only increased their anger.

On 10 October the Hunt Report was published, and a staggering 7000 copies

were sold that same morning. And irrespective of the language it used, no matter how flowery, what it said was devastating: the B-Specials were to be stood down, the RUC were to be disarmed. Ian Paisley had previously said: if you want to disarm a government you first pull out its teeth. To the Protestant community the B-Specials had been their protectors. Emotions were now ramped up to a ferocious degree. The result was the 'Battle of the Shankill' when the people of the Shankill found themselves in direct confrontation with the forces of the state. A young Plum Smith said he was shocked when he saw a man, very respectably dressed, walking down the street, and this was after CS gas had been fired, after warnings had been given that the Army would shoot if they came under threat. The man had an overcoat wrapped around his arm. He folded it neatly on a pillar-box and started firing at the Army, and then quickly left the scene. To Plum Smith, as to many others, nothing would ever be the same again.

Just one last thing. There has been a report recently about a survey carried out regarding the peace-walls, some newspapers taking a positive slant, others less so. It is 50 years since these assorted peace-walls and fences went up. There are 100 different sections of them, and the people living beside them suffer more from criminality than other areas, with drug problems and so on. The newspapers note one optimistic sign in that slightly more people than in a previous survey – 70% – want to see them coming down. But when you read the report in more detail, what people are actually saying is that they would *like* to see them down – *in their grandchildren's time*, but not just now. And that is why these discussions are so important: maybe our younger generations might get a chance to learn the lessons which could prevent this all from happening again. Thank you.

***And that is why these discussions are so important: maybe our younger generations might get a chance to learn the lessons which could prevent this all from happening again.***

[**Robert Foster**] Everything that Jimmy said stands up. Jimmy mentioned that the Shankill was shrinking. The Shankill was indeed shrinking; it was under redevelopment from about 1963, and it is a well-known fact within community circles that the planners didn't actually know what they were doing with the place, they had no real idea. That's why that book was entitled *The Rape and Plunder of the Shankill*, because there was absolutely no future plan, with no consideration given as to how local people felt. Then the Hunt

Report came along in October. Now, Jimmy has explained the lead-up to that, so I want to talk about the actual events.

I have here some notes taken from British Army reports. First is the 'Honeymoon Period' from a book called *Pig in the Middle*, by Desmond Hamill, and he covered the British Army from '69 to '84. He interviewed many army officers, and they said what everyone else said at that time: that you could cut the atmosphere with a knife. If you then add in the fear factor, the B-Specials being disbanded, the RUC going to be limited in what they can do... Then bringing in a new man, Young, who had no idea of what he was coming into. And a lot of people felt that the Army was brought in just to keep the Catholics happy, because the Protestants had seemingly had it all their own way for too long.

So we arrive at the Battle of the Shankill in October. The Army reports says: "In one fracas, at the bottom of the Shankill Road, 41 people were arrested, but only after 700 gas cartridges and grenades had been fired, 48 soldiers, 54 policemen were injured, 60 civilians were hurt, half of them with gunshot wounds. 700 Royal Marine Commandos were coming in from England to back up what was happening. The Stormont government had been hidebound and

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complacent, with serious breaches of discipline by the RUC during the Civil Rights campaign, and subversive elements had used the Civil Rights platform to stir up trouble on the streets. Moreover, the B-Specials, in Lord Cameron's view, were a paramilitary force, recruited exclusively from Protestants." Now we have the Protestant and Unionist people seething with anger.

Everybody knows that the ordinary man in Belfast was hard working, hard living, and that would include hard drinking, that's the way they were. So, with the amazing ignorance of local conditions and lifestyles the report was published on a Friday, when weekly pay-packets were handed out and men would head to the pubs. The Hunt Report recommended the disbandment of the B-Specials and the establishment of a new regiment, the Ulster Defence Regiment, under military control of the GOC. Protestants were rocked back, the angry mood intensified, and by the time they came out of the pubs on Saturday evening they were spoiling for a fight. I will add in another thing. There were quite a few 'no-go' areas at that time, and rumour is only the spark that lights a fire. Rumour had spread that

Carrick Hill – or, as we knew it then, Unity Walk – was about to become a ‘no-go’ area. Now this was at the very bottom of the Shankill. So they were losing their B-Specials, they were restructuring the RUC, they were going to come under the command of the GOC, there was going to be another policeman brought in who knew nothing about the place, and then we were going to have a ‘no-go’ area at the bottom of our road! The fear factor goes in, and the next thing that comes along is siege mentality. You are now heading towards the perfect storm.

And as that night went on... “With a huge Union Jack waved before them and encouraged by the sound of the Lambeg drum they surged forward, and at the front of the road, in front of Unity Flats, the police were drawn up to receive them. And behind the police were soldiers in riot gear. There was little light and what filled the street was dark shadows. The mob swept up towards the thin police line, there was hand-to-hand fighting, but the line held. When the shooting started two policemen fell to the ground, one of them, Constable Arbuckle, was already dying. The police withdrew and a company of Light Infantry moved through to deal with the Protestant mob. The opposition to them was rough, and so were they. They punched their way up the street under fire, they reappeared dragging rioters, sometimes by the hair, sometimes by the feet, with their heads bumping along the ground. One rioter was hurled into a Landrover with such force that he hit the roof before slumping to the floor. We gave them a bloody nose. A police surgeon was to describe the injuries as the worst he had ever seen in a riot. It took the soldiers the rest of the weekend to fight their way to the top of the Shankill Road.”

***[The Army] punched their way up the street under fire, they reappeared dragging rioters, sometimes by the hair, sometimes by the feet, with their heads bumping along the ground.***

And this all came about amid changes that were ongoing about how Protestants seen themselves as in a puzzle which nobody could control, where every piece of their lifestyle, every piece of their very foundation, was getting plucked away, one piece after another. And I don’t think that too many Protestants would have disagreed about giving Catholic people, or any other sort of people, decent housing, decent jobs. I was led to believe that Protestants had everything, and Catholics had nothing. That was the ethos that I grew up with: that we were some sort of an elevated people. And we weren’t, for by and large we were all

working class, but I was there and felt the fear, and all those things that went along with the fear. The entire community getting smaller and moving out, while the Falls Road had kept its strength, and Ardoyne was going to become a nationalist area. So here's the Shankill getting smaller and smaller. And the ingredients were just right to bake that cake that weekend. And unfortunately three people lost their lives: Constable Arbuckle, George Dickie and Herbie Hawe. But little did any of us know that that was more or less the first step to the abyss.

**[Deirdre Mac Bride]** Thank you, Bobbie. Can I open it to the floor now?

**[Andy Hart]** There is a wonderful book by an American Marine Corps officer called *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, and he looks at the American and British experiences in Iraq after the Second Gulf War, and how Britain had always prided itself on having a 'learning' army, while America was vilified as having an army that never learnt. He held up the British Army as being exemplars of successful counter-insurgency campaigns. The two examples he provided were Malaya and Northern Ireland. So, with regard to Sir Arthur Young coming in, he was coming out of Malaya at a time when Britain was facing the retreat from Empire. The Malaya campaign was won by virtue of holding the line, and conceding to the people of Malaya those things which the Communist insurgents were saying they were fighting for. And if you take that model and someone who was so closely associated with it, and apply that to Northern Ireland – and a Protestant community perceiving this person not only as a blow-in who doesn't quite get us, but coming with the baggage of a campaign from elsewhere – that isn't going to look positive for the Protestant community's future outlook.

**[Robert Foster]** I think a lot of people would realise that the Shankill community had above the average amount of servicemen, particularly in the Royal Ulster Rifles, who would have known of this gentleman. And no doubt someone might have said in the pub 'this man is coming in to put his foot all over us'.

**[Jackie Redpath]** One thing that always interests me is that before August '69 it would have been incomprehensible that Protestants from the Shankill would have ended up fighting the RUC. And yet within two months they're facing both the RUC – which you are told were seen as *their* police force – and the British Army. But what led to that change wasn't just within two months, it was a build up over a long period of time: back to 1966 and all the things that happened since then.

**[Issac Andrews]** My uncle was involved in the Civil Rights in New Barnsley (and he ended up being shot coming out of Mackies in '72). And there was a perception then that the nationalist community, the Catholic community, were always at odds with the Protestant community. But let me assure you, before the Troubles erupted Protestants and Catholics looked after each other up there.

I was moved out of my house in Moyard in 1969 because there was stuff beginning to happen up there around that time. I was moved to my granny's house in Northumberland Street, so I was moved right into the middle of it! I was about ten years of age at the time but I always remember it. It was exciting as a kid too, there were so many people on the streets, rushing around getting people into the safety of houses and things like that. You heard the gunfire, and heard about family members and other people you knew in the community who had injuries. I also came from a military background, most of my family would have been involved in the British forces, and it was a shock to see people saying: "We're getting into them! We're going to have to fight these people." But that was the feeling on the ground at that time: "This is it. We have to make a stand!"

***[M]ost of my family would have been involved in the British forces, and it was a shock to see people saying: "We're getting into them! We're going to have to fight these people."***

**[Robert Foster]** I think too one of the elements that played an awful lot in the Protestant or Unionist psyche was New Barnsley. It had went, Moyard had went, Valsheda Park had went, Farrington Gardens.... We know a lot of nationalist people were put out of Conway Street and Percy Street and things like that there, but it was hard to contemplate: was there any other *entire estates* lost? I lived on the Springfield Road and we were actually told by Catholics, whenever both sides were out throwing stones at each other: "We'll have the whole road one day!" Just that little enclave of Highfield estate held on.

**[Issac Andrews]** I have to say, when I was living up in Moyard and New Barnsley they were the best years of my life, but that all changed overnight.

**[Robert Foster]** When I was writing a book I interviewed 127 people, including Catholics who lived in Highfield estate and had moved to Turf Lodge, to get their side of things. 60% of them moved out *before* the Troubles started, but it looks

bad when you say that Highfield was once one Catholic house in four, and after '69 it was one in nine, so it looked bad. When you look at statistics you say: that's bad, the Troubles did that. But it wasn't *only* the Troubles, it was because they were building primary schools at the top of Turf Lodge and building new houses up there, and people naturally moved with their children to be closer to the schools. But to have to leave your house was a terrible experience *for anyone*. Everything that you had worked your life for, for your wife and children, was in those four walls, and for people to come and take that all away from you, and turn your life upside down.... And that's the sort of things that was happening.

***Everything that you had worked your life for, for your wife and children, was in those four walls, and for people to come and take that all away from you, and turn your life upside down....***

I had been listening to Mr Adams claiming that Protestant people moved out of New Barnsley because of intimidation [from their own side]. And the fear factor had indeed crept into the Unionist/Protestant psyche, but there was one photograph which showed furniture being moved out of a house, and quite clearly on the neighbour's house next door it has painted on a window: 'I am a Catholic'. Now, why would anybody paint that on their window if there was no intimidation from other Catholics?

[**Issac Andrews**] Me and my brother were heading home from Sunday School – you were threw out to Sunday School whether you liked it or not – and we saw a crowd of guys at Moyard Parade, and there was somebody on the ground and he was being kicked. Our first thought was to get home quick. We got home, the family was in the house, and they said: "We're moving, we have to get out, grab whatever you can!" Now, I since found out that that person died, I don't know whether he was a Catholic or a Protestant but my first thought was: this is it! So there was a massive fear. And I am not looking for excuses for what happened after that, but that was in people's minds.

[**Jim McDermott**] I think there was a longer build-up, even since Partition, of a siege mentality: This thing is going to happen, this is coming, this is coming! Even the poems you were learning at school, say by Rudyard Kipling: "If England drive us forth we will not fall alone." All these things were building into the fabric of the Protestant/Loyalist psyche.

[**Jackie Redpath**] I think there is one other element in my memory, very vivid, around August '69. The idea of the IRA being there was a big, big notion in our minds. And then the stuff that the British government were doing within days of August '69, such as Wilson's 'Downing Street Declaration', in which he insisted on major reforms. But the other thing was the gathering of the Irish Army along the border. When Jack Lynch came on TV and talked about 'not standing idly by', well, that was like 'we're going to invade'. That was massive in people's minds.

[**Padraig Yeates**] He said 'not stand by' but that was turned by his critics into 'not stand *idly* by' because he wasn't actually doing anything. I joined the republican movement in 1964, my excuse was that I was young at the time. One thing which struck me over the years, was that Nationalists, or Catholics, or Republicans – or however you want to describe them – I think it is wrong to call it sectarian, because it has absolutely nothing to do with religion as such, what it was to do with was different identities. But Catholics, nationalists, have always been pro-active, they have always been looking for something, and had an objective, which is usually some sort of United Ireland. And unionists have tended to be reactive, and it is a case of wanting to keep what we have, which is a perfectly understandable emotion to have. But I think that is one reason why the the Unionist agenda always seems to be one of retreat.

***Nationalists have always been pro-active, they have always been looking for something, and had an objective, which is usually some sort of United Ireland. And unionists have tended to be reactive.***

[**Issac Andrews**] Do you think that the IRA was not sectarian then?

[**Padraig Yeates**] No, my feeling has changed a lot. I lived in England for a while. My father never had any time for nationalism, of either an Irish or British form, he never wore a poppy or an Easter lily, and I have come to now think like him. The problems you describe on the Shankill I have seen in Birmingham, in Bristol, in Dublin; I have seen them everywhere I lived. Working-class communities chopped up to make room for new plans, which envisaged a future which nobody knows about except the planners, and are never explained. I have been in housing offices so many times in Dublin trying to explain that families are being broken up and people needed to stay together. And you would have some official there

laugh and say, “Are these grown-ups or are they children! Why is it they need to live near their mothers? Why can’t they move on with their lives?” And there is that lack of understanding of community, and the importance of community, which maybe people are only now beginning to realise the cost of, in Dublin as much as in Belfast. I do think there is a problem though in that loyalists need to be more *pro-active*. If you are looking at the unionist/loyalist community from the outside, it is hard to see a long-term strategy, of people saying where are we now, where do we want to get to, which is almost intrinsic among nationalists, maybe because they felt oppressed and they had to fight back, and that anything we got we fought for. And I have never seen within the unionist community, again looking at it from the outside: what do these people want, where do they think they are going... because if you don’t have a plan, or goals and objectives going forward, you are always going to end up on the back foot, always going to be pushed back.

***And I have never seen within the unionist community, again looking at it from the outside: what do these people want, where do they think they are going?***

[**Michael Hall**] Soon after the Battle of the Shankill, the local people organised a People’s Tribunal and it catalogued the brutality inflicted by the army: it was quite extensive, dragging pregnant women along the street, and such things. So obviously the battle was brutal on both sides. There were 700 canisters of CS gas used, and this in a closely-packed area with women and children and older people.

[**Andy Hart**] I think if you look at different campaigns you are going to find a number of individual soldiers who behaved with a degree of brutality.

[**Michael Hall**] I accept that, but it does seem from the People’s Tribunal Report that the brutality was quite extensive.

[**Robert Foster**] Moving on from the Battle of the Shankill, within another three years there was another fracas, as the army describes it, and it happened in and around Brussel Street and that was mid-Shankill. And I recently came into possession of a little book – printed unbelievably by the ‘UDA Press’ – and it is called *May 1972*, when there were two civilians shot dead as well. So to sort of compound any suspicions about the Army after that, here they were at it again, and this time it was the Parachute Regiment.

[**Issac Andrews**] As I said, most of my family came from the British Army, and in around '72, a couple of friends and I were taken in a 'Pig' [armoured personnel carrier] from Highfield, where we had been rioting. We were taken into Springfield barracks and put up against the wall, for an hour, and the soldiers were throwing small pebbles at our heads. After an hour of getting us in these stress positions they said they were going to drop us back. The police said, "We'll take you home", but the army said, "No, we know where they live, we'll drop them off." So they put us into a Pig and put on their black gloves and started to beat us, and we were taken up to Kelly's Bar, which was still there at the time, and that's where we were thrown out. And we had to run over the mountain; luckily enough we knew how to get home. So a benign perception of the British army is certainly not my recollection of what happened in and around that time.

[**Robert Porter**] At that time people formed themselves into gangs. We had the Shankill Tartan, the Woodstock Tartan, you had Tartan gangs from the Falls Road area; the one in Highfield hadn't much sense – they were called the 'Orange Peel'! Now, this gang used to trade insulting graffiti with this parachute regiment: the gang would have left 'So-and-so is a ...' and the following morning the Paras would have written: 'Orange Peel, you better watch out!' ... and all this. Anyway, there was a guy called Norman Bell. He was out walking his dog, and, rightly or wrongly, the Army identified Norman with this gang. So they stopped poor Norman: "What are you doing?" Norman tied the dog to a fella's railing, and said: "I'm out for a dander." "Out for a dander, are you?" They put him in the landrover, drove him halfway down the M1 and said, "Now you can dander home!" That was the sort of attitude.

[**Issac Andrews**] There is one thing which still resonates to this day from those years and the deaths that occurred at the hands of the British Army. There is a big furore at the moment among some of the Bloody Sunday families demanding that the soldier identified as 'Soldier F' be prosecuted, and in many loyalist areas banners have gone up in his support. But the Shankill is the only place where there was *no* banner up for 'Soldier F' and that goes back to what happened to this area at the hands of the British Army, and people still have that memory in them.

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[**Teena Patrick**] I think after the Battle of the Shankill people became mobilised in their own areas, to protect those areas, in whatever way we could. Because it wasn't just people in the Shankill that were losing their homes, there was people in other areas. For example, my granny lived in Ballycastle Street, we were burnt out of there on the Oldpark, and even though the Oldpark was a mixed area the Protestant people were put into a wee area of our own, and the Catholic people took over an area on the Oldpark Road. So other areas were becoming like that, and then when the White Paper was published women and children were out protesting, then you had the vigilantes on the street, who were protecting the areas, and it didn't matter if it was a mixed area. I am thinking of where I lived now, Workman, it was a very mixed area and the vigilantes were out protecting *everybody* in the area. For whenever my mum moved up there she lived next door to Catholics, so they were protecting everybody in that area. There wasn't a peace-line there for a long time, but people had that sense of fear, of losing their area, because there were houses the whole way down the Springfield and then one by one they were destroyed and our community was deteriorating, and people were saying 'we need a wall up here, because if we don't get a wall up here we are going to lose our community'.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] My sense is that we all keep separating. I think 20% of the population in Belfast moved house up to the early mid-seventies; and my understanding is that Catholics moved *in*, Protestants moved *out*. And so areas changed in all sorts of ways.

[**Harry Stockman**] If I could come in on the back of what Teena was saying about peacewalls. I lived in the shadow of a peace-wall, it was about 100 yards from us. I remember... I was nine-years-old when the Troubles started and I witnessed the battle of Bombay Street. I remember the soldiers coming in. It was surreal. We were standing beside these soldiers. Never had I imagined this would all be happening around me. I remember the first 'peace-line' barrier – if you want to call it that – along Cupar Street, and it was put up by my da. He hijacked a bus on the Shankill, drove it down, and stuck it across the bottom of Lawnbrook Avenue – I couldn't believe it! There was my da, an ordinary working-class man goes out to do something to defend the area. Subsequently it was set on fire. and was added to by the people

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of the neighbourhood. That was our first line of defence. After that there were vigilantes in the street. Ordinary guys, who would have been out at night patrolling the area, then getting a few hours' sleep before going to their work.

**[Issac Andrews]** There was other major battles that happened after that, around Ainsworth Avenue: that was around peace walls and the unionist community felt under threat and the British Army weren't protecting them then and weren't putting up [their own] barriers. And over about three days about 20,000 people arrived in Ainsworth Avenue. For me, personally, that was the first time I saw the unionist community really standing up, and the British Army actually stood down. And the peace-walls were then put in place to safeguard the people at that time. The barriers started off with bits of wood and stuff, and then they ended up with what we have now. Somebody mentioned earlier about this new report that has come out about people seemingly wanting to see the walls come down. I find that hard to believe, it's not what I'm hearing on the ground. I don't think these people are actually talking to the very people who live right beside the peacewalls.

**[Jim McDermott]** People always give more positive responses when questioned in surveys, for they don't want to look bad. People were saying that in two generations' time they would *like* to see them away. What they are really acknowledging is that they will be up for a long time yet.

*People were saying that in two generations' time they would like to see [the peacelines taken] away. What they are really acknowledging is that they will be up for a long time yet.*

**[Eddie McIlwrath]** My family had to get out from where we lived. I remember coming down the road on the back of a lorry. And I remember all the policemen were on the ground sleeping; they had just been brought down from Londonderry. We moved into a house just opposite Agnes Street.

**[Robert Foster]** Where we were at the top of the Springfield we had personally witnessed the emptying of Moyard and New Barnsley estates. We had witnessed all this and on top of this with Jack Lynch coming out with his statement, and then these busfulls of nationalist children being taken down to Butlins, Mosney, and you were saying to yourself: what is happening here? Are they getting the kids out of the road? Of course, quite a few Protestant kids were taken to Liverpool.

[**Jacqueline McNeilly**] We were taken to a monastery and it was so, so scary as a child. And even at the time of the Battle of the Shankill – I was only six years old – I can still remember my mummy saying get the mattresses onto the floor in case any of the bullets would come in the window. I think, looking back, how did I come through that? I hear young ones now talking about: “Oh, we’ll get the guns out on the streets again,” and I hope and pray that that will never happen.

[**William Mitchell**] I was born in the York Street Docklands area. And it was a mixed area. People gravitated to the Docks for work. Historically that has always been the case. There was no real conflict between the communities, in the way other areas were more polarised. But with the outbreak of the conflict that changed. It became a nationalist majority then, as Protestants were moving out to the outskirts of North Belfast: Mount Vernon, Shore Crescent, White City and Rathcoole. But then I was thrown into the conflict as a young man at fifteen and spent 13 years in Long Kesh.

As Jimmy said, we have subsumed a number of things that had been ingrained into our psyche, which I am open to admitting here now might not necessarily be 100% true. But nevertheless some perceptions become seen as factual. And it brings to mind this notion that there will be no such thing as a single narrative about this place. And I don’t think there should ever be, because that implies that there is only one reality, and of course we know there isn’t one reality. And is there an inevitability of being involved when you are immersed in all these things which surround us? And to me the answer must be: no, there shouldn’t be. And I think that if we pursue a narrative that isn’t necessarily true, or isn’t as clear cut until you drill down into it by hearing people’s lived experiences – such as at events like this – we run the risk of creating a new generation of young people, who, if we spoon-feed them a narrative that isn’t 100% accurate will run the risk of repeating the past.

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[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] In the narrative you are talking about, is it that all the movement and all the fear was generated by this fear of the ‘other’, whereas in some ways the communities were *already* being destabilised by large-scale redevelopment?

[**William Mitchell**] Something which strikes me too, in Jim's opening comments: if the narrative is about this 'zero-sum' game, and Catholics were, for a significant period of time, particularly since Partition, denied a number of things that others – namely Protestants – weren't, why since the disbandment of the B-Specials, the new legislation around voting and fair employment and so on, and if those things were achieved – and as we know they were legislated for very quickly after the civil rights movement demanded them – *why then did we go on to do what we did to each other?* Why did 1972 become the worst single year in the history of our conflict, when 467 people died? Why, if we were on the way to finding a political resolution to this, did this continue?

***Why, if [the Civil Rights demands were largely met and] we were on the way to finding a political resolution to this, did this continue? ... Why did we go on to do what we did to each other?***

[**Peter Bunting**] There is an easy answer to that. We *weren't* on the way, for one section certainly. I was engaged in the Battle of Divis Street, and the Tricolour incident [1964]; I can go back that far. My father was the Independent Labour candidate for the Loaney and Brown's Square at the bottom of the Shankill and he was well thought of. I joined the republican movement in 1969, a time when we had a huge problem of fear; that we were going to be overrun – on both sides. And you are quite correct in your question: why did we do that to each other? Now, I was the first full-time employee in what is called the modern-day Sinn Féin. I was with Seán Mac Stíofáin, Dáithí Ó Conaill, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and all those others. The one thing the Provisional movement never did, they never did any political classes within their own ranks. There was never a political narrative within Sinn Féin/IRA – whatever you want to call it, the Republican movement – it did no politics at all. That was one of the reasons I packed it in.

But I would suggest that rather than be thinking of the past, what we also want to be thinking about is: *how do we never do it again to each other?* Because I left the republican movement around '76 and transitioned into the trade union movement; that was for me something I could put my *whole* self into, body, soul, mind – everything, and making a difference to people in our community, irrespective of what community it was. And what does transitioning mean? We have spent millions upon millions of pounds in our communities, but how has it

helped this society transition in any meaningful way? And to me there should be a political narrative about how we make our society a better place for all of us. Looking back in retrospect is undoubtedly important, but I think that we will never get to the truth because it is such a mess of pottage, built solely on the foundation of rumour, counter-rumour – and never the twain will meet within that situation. Catholics were no different from Protestants in their living conditions, so who kept that difference going? Was it the elite of the Unionist community telling the poor working-class Protestants: you're better off than the Catholics. It was tuppence looking down on a penny ha'penny. It was all nonsense.

[**Issac Andrews**] In history most victors or whoever shift the facts to suit the narrative that they perceive in order to move forward. But when you talk about reconciliation I believe that our communities, both the nationalist community and Protestant community, need to reconcile *within themselves* first, before they reach out for full *cross-community* reconciliation. In Northern Ireland, we keep talking about reaching agreement on the past; there is *never* going to be an agreement on the past. I had certain things happened to me, and that became my life. I think that happened to a lot of people, and they have learnt to move on from that, and that what I was being told, as opposed to what it was really about, is not actually factual. However, the thing which gets me to this day is the *justification*. You have a political party out there which is justifying their past, and then they are saying to the so-called dissidents: you're wrong, but *we* were right. And that is still happening to this day. And that is the wrong message to be sending out to young people, the justification. There was no call for *any* innocent losing their life.

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[**Padraig Yeates**] Unless we get the truth at some level it is very hard to bury the past, because everyone has their own version. And for certain parties their own side's casualties were 'victims' while the other side's casualties were 'terrorists'. What we need to do is find a truth recovery process where people can come forward and say what happened. From my limited engagement with people most of them want to know *why*, and the one thing the justice system will not give them is 'why'. And the political establishment, the security forces, the paramilitaries, do not necessarily want the whole truth come out. Because when

you try to ask *why* did this happen, then the next question you have to answer is: *who* is ultimately responsible?

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] The context of today is that we get a sense of understanding, by people being able to bear witness to what happened, not only on a personal, individual level but what was happening across Belfast at that time. And if we are to move on we have to find some resilience as a community, to enable us to not always fall into identity politics, because that is very dangerous for us.

[**Sean O'Hare**] To put the whole thing into context, you have to realise that 1969 was almost 50 years from when Northern Ireland was set up. So in the same way that many people today can recall the events of 1969, so too many people in 1969 could recall the events around Partition.

Regarding the barricades, you have to remember that after the initial events in '69 things quietened down until Internment came in. I lived in Bombay Street but I worked in Glencairn, and I was able to walk back to Bombay Street without any problem. It was only Internment that really wrecked the whole thing. Peter was talking about the difference between the Shankill and the Falls, and I remember Gusty Spence saying at a meeting that he lived in the same conditions as the people in the Falls Road, but he owned Australia, and they didn't. If you think about it, it's a cultural thing: 'we belong to the British Empire'. And the problem about moving on is that we were told all our lives that 'we' have to win against 'them', Unionists were told they had to win against us. But it's not going to be like that; we're going to have to come to some sort of arrangement.

And the difference on the two cultural sides, I think is this: on the Loyalist/Protestant side they always had people to look after them: vote them in and they'll look after us – whether they did or not is another question. Peter said his father was a member of Independent Labour. In every other pub on the Falls Road people would argue on behalf of Irish Labour, Independent Irish Labour, Republican Labour, the Nationalist Party... the debate was continuous, because they hadn't got power. If they had've had power like Unionists it might have ended, but that's perhaps why nationalists seem to be more organised, because they have been used to political debate over the years.

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[**Harry Stockman**] Some people have touched upon legacy issues and dealing with the Past. But does anybody have a notion of how we're going to deal with legacy, if one of the main protagonists are locked away from the process and aren't allowed to help design how the process is going to work? And I am talking about loyalist paramilitaries. Does anyone believe that [DUP leader] Arlene Foster is going to be able to bring some sort of closure to the legacy issue; who is she even going to talk to? And is there any real desire within the republican community to get themselves involved in the legacy issue and be as straight as they can be about their past activities?

[**Padraig Yeates**] There is an appetite there for some people, in all former paramilitary groups, but they are individuals, there is no organised group within that community. But some people will just have to start meeting and exploring it, and see what comes out of it. In every other European country they have a 'statute of limitations', but the Anglo-Saxon system is the only one which doesn't allow you to draw a line. With conditions attached, you *could* have engagement. I think it's the only way forward, otherwise it will only be passed on to the next generation.

[**Issac Andrews**] There is an imbalance in all current talk of a truth commission. The truth is that we are not going to get the truth – and that's the truth!

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[**Peter Bunting**] It's all about your own truth. I was asked to speak to the PUP conference a few times, and one time I was asked to do the Billy McCaughey Inaugural Lecture, after he died. And I said I have a problem with that, and they asked 'why'? I said because Billy McCaughey is hated in our house. He was an apprentice in the Midland Railway down at York Street, and he put my father out of work, at gunpoint. And my father never worked again; he became an alcoholic and that was it, he wasted away. But I got up anyway and did my thing, and said: I stand here in front of you the son of a man put out of work by Billy McCaughey... I got a standing ovation at the end of it! So when you come to this truth thing it is down to individuals, because you will never get the full truth, because the IRA – or whoever – don't record everything they do. I have been involved in ceasefires: I did the INLA decommissioning, the most recent one last

year was Óglaigh na hÉireann. I have worked with all these guys but the interesting thing which is amazing is the different personal stories you hear. However, a lot of individuals *should* be authorised to come forward and say what they did.

[**Tim Plum**] There is the identity issue here. I think that there is a power dynamic, that politics has overtaken everything else, there is no longer a class identity, right? Shankill and Fall: same people, same problems, same incomes, it is basically the same, just with a wall dividing them. Identity here is about the national: ‘I am British’, ‘I am Irish’; it subsumes everything else. It is not ‘I’m poor, he is rich’; there is *some* of that but really it is about national identity, we see that in the politics going on now about ‘Unite the Union’. Well, that’s just reinforcing division, that’s not uniting people. It is not about uniting this country as a country, it’s about uniting on one side of the wall or the other.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] And I suppose the question in some way, heading into Brexit, is where is the space within communities, to actually find a conversation which is about the future, because it seems to me, looking at the decade of centenaries one of the things that we were interested in when doing that, is that we need to understand Partition, and we need to understand the impact and consequences that has had, for all of us. Which is that we are stuck in this identity politics.

[**Matt Bell**] First of all, it has been really good to get you guys’ experiences, about the Battle of the Shankill and stuff, for obviously I have no experience of it myself. In my generation we get mostly information about the Troubles from textbooks. We get dates, we get facts, we get told ‘this happened... that happened’. And that’s how my generation get our information. We are kind of spoon-fed information about it, and it is all very cut and dried: ‘this was their fault, these were the things that happened...’ so I think this

has been really useful, especially for me. I was never taught about the fear you people had, and why you were so worried about communities being invaded and things like that. I think that these kind of stories are very important for the

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resolution of it all, because people like me do not understand the reality of it all, there is no human voice. You were talking about young people wanting to take up guns again, and the reason why they talk like that is because there is no reality to them, they don't know the reality of those events. These kinds of conversations are important and they should be happening with the younger generation, because they don't have that reality.

***These kinds of conversations are important and they should be happening with the younger generation, because they don't have that reality.... there is no human voice.***

[**Andy Hart**] We still don't have integrated schooling in Northern Ireland anywhere near the level we should, and fewer than 25% of students in Northern Ireland go on to study History, beyond Key Stage 3. Should we be being more proactive, Matt, for your generation – could we have done more within the education system to bring this history to a real and life-based interpretation?

[**Matt Bell**] It's only one module on a history course. I did it in Year 3 for a few months. And that wasn't even just the Troubles, that was *all* of Irish history; the Easter Rising and all.... It's just another school subject for these kids, and that's why they have no reality, and I think why they're so easily led sometimes. Because we don't have people actually talking to us about their lived experiences.

[**Jim McDermott**] I was a history teacher and O-level and A-level History under the CCEA Board is incredibly difficult, the bar is set very high. That's why so many schools opt to do English boards, but that means you don't follow a relevant curriculum.

[**Jackie Redpath**] What strikes me listening to the earlier conversation about '69 and August and October... What gave rise to drawing people in massive numbers was events, circumstances, that got completely out of control. And when you bring that forward to now, there are big events happening at the moment in our society, in the UK, and in Europe, and we just need to be aware that events can create situations that you cannot anticipate. And your point, Deirdre, about how we find space to discuss things is very important. And there are two points about that. It is not just about space to talk across different traditions; I think in Unionism at the minute we need space to talk within Unionism, that will be vital. Because the same feeling of threat that existed then, or the *perception* of threat

in '69 – and perception is everything – the perception of threat *now* is of gigantic proportions and it is structural, it is not just somebody coming up the street, it's actually massive. So we need to be aware of that, and if there is no coherent response to it, then talking across cultures and across traditions is fine but there needs to be discussion *within* traditions. And that is not happening.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] And I think that discussion needs to be happening also within the broader nationalist community.

[**Sean O'Hare**] We all talk about our differences and then we leave the room and go our separate ways. What is needed is a social forum which concentrates on the commonalities of working-class people, where we can come together and discuss everything.

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[**Harry Donaghy**] One of the things we are coming up against, is that when you start questioning foundation myths, it's a hard thing to actually tackle. We are not dealing with stuff from the mists of time – this is within the living memory of people in this room. But it doesn't detract from the difficulty we face. So, how do we construct conversations, or engagements in and around that? We have to disengage the mindset that says 'we are here to win'. If we are really sincere that we don't want other generations to repeat that, then are we not duty-bound almost to continue in the efforts that Matt outlined?

[**Eddie McIlwrath**] I worked in the McClay Library in Queens. With reference to the teaching of Irish History, or the history of Northern Ireland – whether it be about Unionists or Nationalists – in the McClay Library on the second floor we had something like 16,500 books on Irish History but it is mostly geared around the Famine and the Irish Catholic side of history. Even in that part of the library, or in the short-term loan section, there were only 17 books from the Battle of the Boyne to the current day. So a balanced history is not being taught.

[**Robert Foster**] I have actually enjoyed today. We talk about getting agreement, but you need to create the basis for agreement. But if you look around the room here – at the age of most of us, our term is over, *we* are not going to create any agreement. What you have to do is create a basis of agreement with young people,

and somewhere along the line the government or the powers-that-be are going to have to say to people: we don't care what church you belong to, we don't care what your cultural identity is, your children are all going to go to school together. It means that six hours a day you have children being brought together and learning about one another.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] It is clear that people feel there is a need to continue these conversations, and develop them in different ways, and in different communities, in terms of looking forwards, or trying to involve more young people, or at least be mindful of their futures.

[**Issac Andrews**] I have been talking to Harry about getting more young people involved. I have been involved in these discussions going back I don't know how many years, and they are good, and some good relationships have been built through them, but very little action has taken place. So I was talking to Harry about this and that's where I want to be in it: get young people in, give them the experience of listening to people. Not political speeches, just life stories of what it was like, and let them make their own minds up. But the shift of the paradigm has to happen with the older generation, because if those children go to integrated education and then come back to their own community, it is the same conversations they will have heard before. So the shift has also to happen with the older generation too.

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[**Harry Donaghy**] We have seen the importance in young people taking part in these types of conversations, hence, in parallel with our other talks and discussions, we have one designed specifically to do that, Bobby, and it's called 'Generations in Conversation', where we can get people like yourselves or others in this room, and minus party political speeches but just relating their experiences of back in the day and where they want to go in the future.

[**William Mitchell**] On behalf of ACT can I thank you all for a great turnout, and a special thank-you to the speakers.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Yes, thank you all for the discussion today.