

Reflections on 1969
Lived Experiences & Living history

(Discussion 5)

Loyalism and Unionism under Threat?

compiled by

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Published December 2019 by
Island Publications
132 Serpentine Road, Newtownabbey BT36 7JQ

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<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/islandpublications>

The Fellowship of Messines Association

gratefully acknowledge the assistance they have received
from their supporting organisations



Community Relations Council



An Roinn Gnóthaf Eachtracha
agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs
and Trade



Belfast
City Council

Printed by Regency Press, Belfast

Introduction

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

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

The fifth discussion in the series was held in the Linen Hall Library, Belfast, on 2 November 2019. The discussion was chaired by **Deirdre Mac Bride**, and **Harry Donaghy** gave a brief presentation before the discussion was opened up to those present, some of whom had either been participants in, or witnesses to, the period under discussion.

The theme of this fifth workshop was *'Loyalism and Unionism under Threat?'* The discussion which ensued was edited slightly to fit into the space available in this pamphlet.

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

Loyalism and Unionism under Threat?

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] So, folks, you're very welcome to a smaller gathering than usual – perhaps the Rugby World Cup Final has had something to do with it! Harry has agreed to set the scene for today's talk, which is: *Loyalism and Unionism under Threat?* And after Harry does that, I know there are people here who were around at the time and will hopefully also contribute.

[**Harry Donaghy**] The time-frame we have currently arrived at in this series of discussions, in terms of the 50 years since the outbreak of the Troubles, brings us up to the autumn of 1969. By that stage the hardline wing of Unionism had mounted a serious political campaign. In a matter of months they had ended Captain Terence O'Neill's political career as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, and replaced him with Major Chichester-Clark (who himself was to be replaced by Brian Faulkner in March 1970). Events had moved fast since the outbreak of the Troubles in August 1969. In October the Hunt Report was published and it recommended the disbandment of the B-Specials. The British government further announced that the RUC was to be disarmed, and the Special Powers Act, which had been at the use of the Stormont government since 1920, was prorogued.

Nationalists viewed these developments as progressive steps. From I was a child playing in Theodore Street, I had never seen a policeman *without* a gun. For many in the Unionist community, however, there was a fear that this avalanche of reforms was selling out the Union, selling out Ulster, selling out Unionism. And

when you look back at newsreel footage of some of Rev. Ian Paisley's speeches he was basically implying that it was the end of civilisation as they knew it: the British government had taken away their protection force, the B-Specials; they had disarmed their police force; and they had taken away those laws which at the time had been the most draconian¹ in Western Europe.

For many in the Unionist community, however, there was a fear that this avalanche of reforms was selling out the Union, selling out Unionism.

1 In April 1963, the South African Minister of Justice, when introducing a new Coercion Bill in the Apartheid parliament, said that he "would be willing to exchange all legislation of this sort for one clause of the Northern Ireland Special Powers Act."

The effect that this was having in Protestant/Unionist communities, especially in working-class communities, was that it was all seen as one more step in a concerted effort to force them into a United Ireland. They feared they were going to lose their country, their British heritage – indeed, everything that they held dear. Some of the language used back then is frighteningly similar to what some Unionist politicians are using today on the Brexit issue: we’re under threat, we’re surrounded by enemies; the Irish government, Nationalist parties, are all conspiring to separate us from the rest of the UK.

Nowadays we’ve perhaps lost touch with just how much of an impact those events had on people. There is a famous photo, taken just after the Hunt Report was published, of the new RUC Chief Constable, the GOC, General Freeland, and Jim Sullivan, the Chairman of the Citizens Defence Committee, walking together down Leeson Street. Negotiations had been going on in both sections of the community to get agreements to take down the barricades. I remember it myself, standing in Leeson Street, and I couldn’t believe it – for the first time in my life seeing a policeman who wasn’t armed. Then two-man foot patrols went on the beat at the same time in Belfast and Derry, ‘Dixon of Dock Green’-type stuff. And people were just thinking: is this really happening?

I remember it myself, standing in Leeson Street, and I couldn’t believe it – for the first time in my life seeing a policeman who wasn’t armed.

Nationalism in general could now see that what the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association had been campaigning for was actually being turned into hard reality. And given that the first confrontations with the state had been concerned with housing issues – the infamous Caledon squatting incident, the Derry Housing Action Committee campaigns – the establishment of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive – where housing allocation was now taken out of the hands of borough councils and given to a state-funded body whose sole purpose was to build housing for the people who *needed* it, rather than as a product of political patronage – was seen a big, big step forward for people.

The Northern Ireland Labour Party had also been on a roll at the time, because it was the only political grouping within Northern Ireland that had membership which stretched across all communities in Belfast. They had quite a significant political presence in Belfast City Corporation, from the forties, fifties, and into the sixties especially. Areas like the Falls, Woodvale, Shankill, Court, East

Belfast... all returned councillors from the Northern Ireland Labour Party. They had a social club in Waring Street and even back then it was one of the few places in Northern Ireland where you could legally get a drink on a Sunday. And there were many political rallies held there to which people from all over Belfast came. Now, the Constitution was always a big question, but as historian Aaron Edwards argued in his *History of the Northern Ireland Labour Party*, the Northern Ireland Labour Party was the only non-sectarian political alternative to mainstream Unionism. And the higher echelons of Unionism, detested – and, indeed, feared – the labour movement. And we all know what happened to those they labelled ‘rotten Prods’ in the 1920s.

But in 1969 all the raw nerves, all the pressure points within Unionism, were touched to engender a deep-seated sense of insecurity within the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community. Paisley and Major Bunting were energetically doing the rounds, whipping the crowds up: ‘They’re going to take everything away from us! The South is going to take over!’ And this was despite the fact that the Irish government at that time had *no* agenda to force Northern Ireland into a United Ireland; all they wanted, and were concentrating their efforts on, was to have a political administration put into place here that had the support of all citizens, Protestant and Catholic.

But in 1969 all the raw nerves within Unionism were touched to engender a deep-seated sense of insecurity within the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community.

Hardline Unionism now stepped up its efforts to fight back. As Gusty Spence said: we didn’t form the UVF on our own, we had assistance from leading figures within Ulster Unionism. There had been a bomb attack on the electricity transformer at Castlereagh in March, and on the Silent Valley reservoir and a pipeline at Annalong in April. And now, in October, there was a bomb attack on a hydroelectric power station near Ballyshannon in the Republic, and the same month a bomb at the Wolfe Tone Memorial in Bodinstown. By the autumn of 1969 the UVF had become a physical reality. The rationale was: as the British government has taken all our means of defence away Ulster has been left defenseless, so Ulster has to react.

The package of reforms, which the Civil Rights Movement had called for since its inception, were major achievements and it could be argued that this was led by a force dedicated to peaceful means of change. And, as far as nationalists were concerned, the discriminatory building blocks of the Unionist state, as it had

originally been established, were being taken away and people had a sense of euphoria, and just hoped that progress would be maintained and built on.

[**Eamonn Lynch**] You're talking about a very short time really. You're talking about eighteen months, two years, and everything was turned on its head. Nothing previous had had such success in changing the nature of the state. I also think that it had all come to this because successive British governments had never taken any interest in Northern Ireland. Until the sixties; I remember people like Gerry Fitt bringing across Labour MPs like Paul Rose, but really I cannot remember a British Prime Minister coming over here or even *any* government minister. The biggest mistake Westminster made was to let the Unionists look after the place, for it was only natural that they were going to look after themselves. And of course the Unionists greatly exaggerated the threat of the IRA. It sounded good: these bad guys were going to come out and do this and that. Yet all the Civil Rights were stating was that we only want to be as British as Finchley or whatever, we just want British laws here in Northern Ireland.

[**Michael Hall**] During one of our previous discussions someone said he just couldn't understand *why* the Protestant community should have felt that Civil Rights was a threat to them. I think it is quite a complex issue. Even as early as August 1969 Eamonn McCann lamented that the Civil Rights movement was becoming more and more a specifically Catholic movement.² I also think that

2 In a leaflet produced just days before the 'Battle of the Bogside', McCann had written: "Once upon a time we all talked about the non-sectarian nature of the Civil Rights movement. Now we are planning to seal off the Catholic area of Derry on the Twelfth of August. We are accepting, deepening and physically drawing the line between Catholic and Protestant working-class people." He then describes going to speak to a gathering of residents in the Protestant Fountain area, asking them how they could justify minority Unionist rule by Derry Corporation: "A middle-aged woman told me immediately: 'But if you Catholics were in control there would be no life for us here. We would have to leave our homes and get out.' It was clear that every one of them actually *believed* it. It is ridiculous, I told them. They must have been brainwashed by the Unionist Party." McCann then adds: "But then, look at it from another point of view. Recall the mass march of November 16th. ... In the Diamond afterwards speaker after speaker attacked the Unionist Party. Unionist political personalities were very effectively torn to shreds. Reference was made to [a local Protestant] slum landlord. All the attack was concentrated on the political philosophy which happens to be accepted by the overwhelming majority of Protestants. No attack was made on any political philosophy accepted by *any* section of the Catholics. No mention was made of [a local Catholic] slum landlord. Because by that time the movement... was a mass Catholic alliance, uniting Catholics of all classes and all non-Unionist political parties. ... As a result, it is easy for an adept propagandist to represent the whole Civil Rights movement as anti-Protestant."

those of us on the Left let down the Protestant working class; indeed, we betrayed them in many ways. I was a member of PD [People's Democracy] – and was at Burntolllet – and we repeatedly appealed to working-class Protestants to join with us.³ The problem was that during the Sixties the radical Left were fixated by the world-wide upheavals of that period, and one unfortunate consequence was that 'national liberation' struggles were too often seen to be synonymous with Socialism. I had always felt that was a delusion, but – and I know that this is taking our discussion into a later time period – when the Civil Rights period morphed into the Troubles proper I know that many working-class Protestants thought: here's these people who were talking about working-class unity, yet they are now supporting the IRA.

During the Sixties the radical Left were fixated by the world-wide upheavals of that period, and ... 'national liberation' struggles were too often seen to be synonymous with Socialism.

And that's what eventually happened. I will give you a personal example. Quite a few years into the Troubles, I was taking some Dutch people around the areas from which I selected children for a summer scheme in Holland, and we happened to be in the Beechmount area of the Falls Road. And the Dutch pointed over to one particular building and asked: "What's that over there?" I told them it was a Sinn Féin advice centre. And they asked me to take them inside. And as soon as I stepped through the door a voice said, "Mike, where have you been all these years?" And behind the desk was a friend of mine, who had been in PD with me. He said: "You'll be surprised to know that I've joined Sinn Féin." I said, "It certainly is a surprise! But tell me this: for the last lot of years all I have heard

3 In May 1969, in the *New Left Review*, Eamonn McCann admitted that the Civil Rights campaign, instead of uniting the two communities as originally hoped, was dividing them more than ever: "We keep saying parrot-like that we are fighting on working-class issues for working-class unity... It is a lot of pompous nonsense... The consciousness of the people who are fighting in the streets at the moment is sectarian and bigoted... Everyone applauds loudly when one says in a speech that we are not sectarian, we are fighting for the rights of all Irish workers, but really that's because they see this as the new way of getting at the Protestants."

Even constitutional nationalists spoke in ways which the Protestant community found threatening. On 2 January 1972 at a rally in Falls Park, Austin Currie, SDLP, told the crowd: "I have no doubt that within the next six or seven months Brian Faulkner and his rotten Unionist system will have been smashed. [T]he writing is on the wall for Unionism... I say to [British Home Secretary] Maudling: why the hell should we talk to you? We are winning and you are not."

talk of is ‘Prods and Taigs’, nobody has been talking about socialism, or anarchism – all the things we used to discuss. So tell me this: seeing that you are now in Sinn Féin, what is their take on the economy? Are they happy for it to remain a capitalist economy, or is there even any talk of workers’ control?” And what he said shook me to the core: “Christ’s sake, Mike, we’ll worry about all that when the Brits are kicked out!” And I was stunned.

I know I am jumping ahead in time here, but I really think it was the way Civil Rights seemingly morphed into a new IRA campaign that confirmed many of the initial fears and suspicions that Protestants had held. I think that sometimes we have a tendency to mentally separate the Civil Rights period from the later Troubles, and yet to many Protestants they meshed effortlessly.

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[Deirdre Mac Bride] How soon did that happen?

[Michael Hall] Very quickly. Once the violence escalated the PD, in my view, seemed unable, or unwilling, to promote a radical socialist alternative to physical force Irish republicanism. Even McCann was to write that “There is no such thing as an anti-Imperialist who does not support the Provos, and no such thing as a socialist who is not anti-Imperialist”.⁴ In 1973 I produced a pamphlet lambasting both reactionary Unionism and physical force Republicanism, and a message was relayed to me, from the Provos, that if I wrote anything like that again I would get my “knees ventilated”. Now, the PD leaders used to meet in Kelly’s Cellars every Saturday, and when I complained to them about this threat they said: “It’s your own fault, the whole thing is sewn up between two extremes now; we can’t intervene.” I retorted: “But we brought all those people out onto the streets on the promise of working-class unity.” “Oh, you may forget about *that!*”

[Deirdre Mac Bride] I wonder if some of those fears were partly a product of that sense of the role of the Protestant man to defend Ulster – which is an argument

4 Eamonn McCann, *War and an Irish Town*, New Updated Edition, Pluto Press, 1980, p.176.

PD leader Michael Farrell noted that PD, which had evolved from “a leftist, student-based” body to “become a much more tightly-organised marxist group”, was “the only leftist organisation to give support to the Provisionals’ military campaign.” Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, Pluto Press, 1983, p 358.

from people who look at masculinity, and who say that there is a very strong link between the reverence of the Battle of the Somme and what it meant to be a Protestant male – and which became manifest in a state in which lots of people were in the police or in various reserves, like the B-Specials, and occasionally in paramilitarism. So that it was very easy to whip up that fear?

[**Peter Black**] I think both working classes did show at times that they could transcend the old tribal divisions. I will give you a good example of workers' solidarity. In the Belfast shipyard when I went for election [as shop steward] there were leaflets handed out regarding myself and my political background. And the shipyard usually only had a 30% turnout on the ballot. After those leaflets trying to take the vote away from me, saying that I was a republican and all this, 87% came out to vote and I got their vote, even though they knew that I was a republican. And the convenor was Billy McCracken and another one there was Billy Hull, who was a leader later of the UWC strike. Workers themselves, when it comes down to ordinary bread and butter issues, they thought I would stand up for them against the bosses, so they voted for me. 3,500 votes I got from the shipyard workers, and the same thing happened in Shorts. I think it is important to say that ordinary workers themselves, when it comes to bread and butter issues, the republican and loyalist thing can be set aside.

I think both working classes did show at times that they could transcend the old tribal divisions... When it comes to bread and butter issues, the republican and loyalist thing can be set aside.

[**Harry Donaghy**] As you said, Eamonn, things happened very quickly. And that pace continued. In 1972 Direct Rule was imposed by Westminster, Stormont was prorogued and Unionists and Loyalists were incensed. Bill Craig threatened to make the country ungovernable. Yet just two years later Brian Faulkner, who was up until then a leading light in Unionism, sat down in a power-sharing administration alongside the nationalist SDLP. And now it was Brian Faulkner's turn to be castigated as a 'Lundy', a traitor, a sell-out; he's in league with the Irish government, and this is all a plot to do Ulster down.

[**Eamonn Lynch**] Many commentators would agree that Sunningdale was a far, far better attempt than what we have now.

[**Peter Black**] I studied Sunningdale in detail and it was far superior. For a start you didn't have the D'Hondt system which the present Executive has to have.

[**Harry Donaghy**] In one of our workshops Aaron Edwards presented a paper on *The road to Sunningdale and the UWC Strike*. And at the workshop those representing loyalism, when asked what their thinking had been at the time, said: 'Look, we were getting told that if we don't stop [Sunningdale], the Gardai will be patrolling the Shankill in a few weeks' time! It's a sell-out, they're going to throw us to the Dublin government to be swept away!'

[**Michael Hall**] My understanding, after working for many years at a grassroots level, is that while certain hardline Unionist politicians had no desire to sit down with Catholics in any type of power-sharing arrangement, most ordinary working-class Protestants were not so much concerned over that, what they were worried about was the Council of Ireland, and the threat it seemed to pose to the Union. Eamonn McCann recalled SDLP leaders telling people in Derry that Sunningdale was a step towards ending the state of Northern Ireland.⁵

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[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] In your introduction, Harry, you mentioned that some of the things which were putting loyalism and unionism under threat were the policing issues. But you also mentioned housing. And I come from the country, and I remember the first estate that was allocated after the Housing Executive was set up, in Newtownstewart: the whole town watched to see who got houses. And it was let almost Protestant and Catholic door by door. There was

5 "[In] order to sell the deal to the Catholic community the SDLP had to present it not just as a means of expressing its aspiration towards a United Ireland but as a means of achieving it. Thus, while formal statements at Westminster and elsewhere concentrated on the marvellous fact that representatives of the two communities were 'working together' within Northern Ireland, the line in the Bogside from local SDLP chiefs was that the Agreement should be supported because it helped towards the work of ending Northern Ireland – and that there was therefore no need for the IRA any longer. Meanwhile Protestants were being urged by Mr Faulkner to believe that the Council of Ireland would be a mere talking shop, that insofar as Catholics accepted the Agreement they were accepting the Northern State.... Andy Tyrie, leader of the UDA, remarked: 'Somebody isn't telling the truth.' Actually nobody was."

Eamonn McCann *War and an Irish Town*, New Updated Edition, Pluto Press, 1980, p.141.

a sense that it was really important how this new estate was about to be let, and it was within months of the Executive being set up. But I remember coming to Belfast in '75 and working in Turf Lodge: the area had been re-squatted, it had been due for demolition. I remember seeing the desolation produced by massive slum clearance, especially in East Belfast. So, correct me if I am wrong, but this total disruption of old communities might have been one of the things which was fuelling alienation, bearing in mind that you already had peace-lines coming through places like Alliance and Ardoyne and dividing people. Especially as in those days slum clearance was undertaken on a massive scale, whereas nowadays you do it small scale, bit by bit, and you avoid destroying communities. So I am wondering if any of that played into that sense of unionist or loyalist threat?

[Michael Hall] I would imagine that it did. We also have to remember that the Troubles coincided with the beginning of a gradual downturn in the economy. A lot of industrial jobs, which would have helped give the loyalist working class a sense of security, were slowly disappearing.⁶

I realise I am again jumping ahead of the 1969 period, but here is an anecdote from the 1990s which sums up the social impact of this slow erosion of traditional industrial jobs. George Newell, a community worker in East Belfast, had been trying to bring young Protestant males into an engagement with their local history, their culture, and also with the 'other' community. He once invited a theatre-based group to his community facility in East Belfast. And what this group was going to do was to put on a role-play about the Apprentice Boys march in Derry (which at that time was still deemed contentious). And the organiser said: "Okay, who wants to play a policeman? Who will play a shopkeeper? A Bogside resident? An Apprentice Boys marcher?" And all the young males got involved. At the end of it the organiser turned to the youths and said: "Right, any

6 "The Protestant working class has been demoralised on two fronts simultaneously. The Troubles – which forced Protestants into cultural and political retreat – have coincided with the massive erosion of the industrial base which had provided them with their economic security. Put simply, many in the Protestant working class are no longer 'working' class. The workforce at Belfast Shipyard has plummeted from its peak of 42,000 to just 2,000; Mackies Engineering Foundry has dropped from 7,500 to 390. Many major outside companies with local plants have since departed Northern Ireland: I.C.I., Courtaulds, British Enkalon, G.E.C., Goodyear, Michelin. The collapse of the linen industry saw the closure of numerous mills. Decline or demise has hit other major employing sectors: Gallaghers, the Ropeworks, the stevedores at the docks... Small businesses in the Greater Shankill area, once numbering over 600 before redevelopment, now only total 127."

The Protestant Working Class, Island Pamphlet No 9, Island Publications, 1994.

questions?” And George told me that he was stunned by the first question – “Mister: what’s an apprentice?” George said that that question, coming from a young Protestant male living in what was once seen as the industrial heart of Belfast, where apprenticeships were what all young Protestant males automatically moved into, was a stark reminder of how much things had changed, and changed for the worse.

[**Eamonn Lynch**] And they didn’t know that? In East Belfast! Take education on the Shankill Road. I remember one year, when I was teaching in Divis Street.... There was only one kid – a girl, I think it was – from the Shankill passed the Transfer Test: *only one!* And there was something like 40% on the Falls Road. And some people put that down to the fact that the boys and girls coming up to school-leaving age hadn’t got round to the fact that the jobs weren’t going to be placed any more. They would have needed qualifications; you couldn’t just walk into apprenticeships. But it was a slow process, things didn’t just stop in ’69. Even in the seventies, I remember a careers teacher from Ballygomartin telling me that every so often a guy from the shipyard would come in and say “I need some apprentices for Monday”, and this was a Wednesday. So he went to his class, and asked: “Any of you want a job?” So things didn’t just stop around ’69, it was a gradual decline.

[**Peter Black**] That’s true. I had an experience with Boys Model School. I went to the Boys Model hoping to teach GCSE Economics, and they said: “Oh, we don’t do that, there’s no need for that, most of our boys don’t need that; they’ll get jobs anyway.” In Catholic schools they *had* economic classes, although I didn’t have a Teacher Certificate for teaching in a Catholic school.

And that’s another issue: in Protestant schools or state schools you joined one trade union, and in Catholic schools you joined a different one. The teaching unions were divided along sectarian lines, maybe not deliberately, but historically.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] And teacher training was also divided.

In Protestant schools or state schools you joined one trade union, and in Catholic schools you joined a different one. The teaching unions were divided along sectarian lines, maybe not deliberately, but historically.

[**Eamonn Lynch**] There was a proposal came out to amalgamate the teacher training colleges, and I remember our school, a Catholic secondary, and it never had any symbols around the school, or in the classroom, but within a week or so of the proposal coming out, there was a petition going round to say: No, we don't want any amalgamation. And there was a crucifix put in every classroom! Just overnight. We came into the classrooms and there they were... it was amazing!

Some of the history you grew up with you got from your granny and others. My grandfather was shot dead in 1922 during shooting between Catholic and Protestants; he was totally innocent. Anyway, just through these workshops here, through the auspices of Harry and the Messines Project, I have learnt so much. Particularly Connal Parr's talk that day on the 'rotten Prods'... I mean, I didn't know that there were so many Protestants stood by their Catholic workmates, and they were put out as well. I didn't know that, and I am an amateur historian. All you heard was about the Catholic workers being put out, and they were throwing rivets at them, and all the rest of it.⁷

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[**Michael Hall**] Connal also noted that an RTÉ series on the period never mentioned *any* Protestant workers being expelled. Indeed, another RTÉ series, *1916*, effectively airbrushed Protestants out of Irish history. It referred to Wolfe Tone leading "tens of thousands of Irish rebels", but made no mention whatsoever of the United Irishmen or their Presbyterian leadership. It lauded the American Declaration of Independence yet ignored the massive Ulster-Scots input. It talked about a European Enlightenment, but made no mention of the profound influence of the *Scottish* Enlightenment. It was as if any talk of progressive Protestants just didn't fit their preferred narrative.

[**Eamonn Lynch**] Pdraig Yeates also gave a talk on the First Dáil and talked about that radical document that was put to the Dáil for acceptance....

[**Harry Donaghy**] The Democratic Programme, First Dáil Éireann.

[**Eamonn Lynch**] Yes. I had ever heard of it. I just got a book there recently, and also in a couple of general Irish histories, and it wasn't mentioned at all. But the

⁷ Of the 7,500 workers expelled throughout Belfast during the expulsions of 1920 approximately 2,250 were from the shipyards, the rest from other industries. Most of them were Catholics but they included a substantial minority of Protestants, 1,850 in total.

fact that it had to be amended big time to suit certain people was news to me.

[**Harry Donaghy**] As I understand it it was nearly an entirely different document from the original, because it was deemed as too ‘Bolshevist’. It was far too radical for some people’s political mindset and it was changed almost immediately.⁸

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] As I understand it it was also too radical for ‘the boys’ who had come out of the IRA.

[**Eamonn Lynch**] One of the main authors who wrote it, a guy called Thomas Johnston, and his big sin was the fact that he was British, and he was always viewed with suspicion. There was always a tint of nationalism in that era.

[**Harry Donaghy**] Copies of the original document were read avidly by people who would go on to lead the British Labour Party in the 1930s and 40s. Some of the ideas that pitched up in the Beveridge Report in 1943 can be traced back to it. It was not just a political document but was about the economy, education, health provision, women’s rights, and co-operatives... But when members of the First Dáil looked at what was in the Programme it scared them and they soon changed it.

[**Eamonn Lynch**] Ruth Dudley Edwards – now I don’t agree with everything she writes – but she said that she couldn’t believe the transition from these idealistic young gunmen who were fighting this revolution, who then became so conservative when they came to power.

[**Peter Black**] The common denominator between all the different groups involved [during the War of Independence] was low – it was basically ‘fight the Brits’.⁹

The common denominator between all the different groups involved [during the War of Independence] was low – it was basically ‘fight the Brits’.

8 The Democratic Programme included such phrases as: “It shall be our duty to promote the development of the Nation’s resources, to increase the productivity of its soil, to exploit its mineral deposits, peat bogs, and fisheries, its waterways and harbours, in the interests and for the benefit of the Irish people.” “The right to private property must be subordinated to the public right and welfare.” “The Republic will aim at the elimination of the class in society which lives upon the wealth produced by the workers of the nation but gives no useful service in return.” Proposed insertions like these helped to see the document quickly condemned as ‘communist’.

9 Following the 1918 election Sinn Féin vice-president Fr. Michael O’Flanagan, said: “The people have voted for Sinn Féin, we now have to explain to them what Sinn Féin is.”

[**Eamonn Lynch**] The politics wasn't there. The ordinary fella in a flying column in Cork had no real politics. It was just like here. When things started up here, whether it was a guy in Ballymurphy or up the Donegall Road or somewhere, they only had this hazy notion.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] I think the politics *was* there, at one level. Going back to your point, Michael, about going into that Sinn Féin advice centre and your friend saying 'we'll sort out the economic system when we've got the Brits out' But there *was* a politics going on there, and before that: it was the politics of post-Famine Ireland, when a whole class of people had been wiped out, and you had then the Irish Parliamentary Party and Catholic emancipation, which was about people getting their rights.... I'm trying to remember when the Land Commission did its main work, and this was before the turn of the century, and continued on into the twenties and thirties. But the records of the Land Commission have never been released. Indeed, they are not going to be released, and some believe that the reason they are not going to be released is because *there* is the story of political power in Ireland.

[**Michael Hall**] There is an interesting book by Liam Kennedy, *Unhappy the Land: The Most Oppressed People Ever, the Irish?* He reassesses the pivotal periods, and documents, of Irish history, including The Proclamation of the Irish Republic, the Ulster Covenant, and the Famine. The book presents a fascinating counter-argument to the usual material that comes out, from all sides.

[**Harry Donaghy**] Paisley, just before he passed away, said that, on reflection, the demands of the Civil Rights Movement were legitimate. And that's quite revelatory.

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[**Eamonn Lynch**] The Province was full of euphoria when Hume and Trimble got together in the Assembly. People said this is a new start. It was like Sunningdale all over again, only it is going to get through this time, the whole cross-community thing. But I think the rot set in when McGuinness and Paisley came to dominate. And sometimes people will tell you that in private Paisley could be fine, but see once he was up on a platform he was back to acting, he was going to gulder. I never heard of him saying anything conciliatory at all.

[**Michael Hall**] In October '69, Bernadette Devlin went up to Paisley's house to stress that the Protestant and Catholic working classes had so much in common.¹⁰ And Paisley apparently took on board a lot of the things that she was saying about injustices, but his answer was "I would rather be British than just." Meaning: I know what you are saying has legitimacy, but there is also an undeniable threat to the Union.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] The Hollywell Trust in Derry throughout the early peace process held a lot of discussions and debates and wrote them up as the history of the Hollywell Trust. And it is quite interesting because you see that in those discussions they unpicked the type of consociational agreement we have. And one of the criticisms which are made of those types of agreements is that if you don't get the benefits from them very quickly – in terms of a Bill of Rights, and bringing people together – what you do is you feed the extremes. And the extremes start to feed on the populace, and that's what happened.

[**Tim Plum**] It is interesting comparing today. I was at the Shankill event last night¹¹ with Nigel Dodds, Sammy Wilson, Billy Hutchinson, Frank McCoubrey and others on the platform. And the rhetoric, at least in that public forum, was very reminiscent of the cultural war: 'they' are coming to take our culture, the Irish are invading, the 'barbarians are at the gate'-type thing. The same rhetoric as it

10 "PD, to its credit, made one last effort to avert the clash which everyone could see was coming. One evening around the middle of October, Bernadette Devlin went to see Paisley at his home on Beersbridge Road in east Belfast. In his austere front room, balancing cups of tea on their knees, and frequently interrupted by Paisley's young children, Miss Devlin, Paisley and his wife Eileen endeavoured to understand one another. Miss Devlin... put to Paisley [the PD's] case that the Protestant and Catholic working classes had long-term common interests and a short-term common-aim: the ending of the forty-year rule by gentlemen of the Unionist Party. In personal terms, the trio got on well. Mrs Paisley chatted about the kids. Miss Devlin was surprised, as people are, to discover that the private Paisley is both a warmer man and shows a far deeper intellectual grasp than his public image.... But in political terms they got nowhere. Paisley agreed that there might be injustices, conceded good ground for Catholic resentment. But in the end he said simply: 'I would rather be British than just.' "

Ulster, by the Sunday Times Insight Team, Penguin Special, 1972, p.55

11 The discussion took place against the backdrop of Brexit, the UK's controversial decision to leave the European Union. Unionists and Loyalists were outraged that the proposed Withdrawal Agreement negotiated by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson included a customs border down the Irish Sea which would see Northern Ireland aligned to EU customs rules rather than those of the UK. Many loyalists and Unionists saw this as an attempt to weaken the Union, and mass meetings to discuss their fears are currently ongoing.

was 50 years ago. And I was thinking how it hasn't moved forward here. Even though it has been studied for years and has been written about and looked at – and if you go on any number of tours you get a version of it – it hasn't really been taken on board. 450,000 people signed the Ulster Covenant, yet how many of their descendants still believe in that? Earlier we were talking about the 1974 Sunningdale Agreement that collapsed. Well, here's an agreement that is almost 110 years old that stands the test of time but which even loyalists don't refer to, they don't really talk about it. Things haven't moved forward.

[**Michael Hall**] I think that what has happened is that over the last number of years there has been a *conflict containment* process here, not a *conflict resolution* process. And people confuse an all-embracing 'peace process' with a much narrower *political* process. Before the All-Party Talks and the setting up of the New Assembly you could have said that, within *all* sectors of this society – grassroots, ex-combatant, even (if somewhat reluctantly) party political – there was a genuine 'peace process'. You had the likes of former UVF member Billy Hutchinson going into Catholic/nationalist areas to sit on discussion panels. Likewise you had the likes of former IRA member Tommy Gorman getting involved in discussions in Protestant/loyalist communities; and you had a lot of people at the grassroots almost pushing the politicians towards some sort of accommodation. There was a genuine, all-enveloping *peace* process.

Then whenever the politicians came back centre-frame again and got into Stormont, they said: 'leave it to us now'. And activists working at the grassroots, who had enough on their hands dealing with socio-economic deprivation, were glad enough to focus their energies on that. And so the people withdrew from the ongoing peace process, assuming that it was now the focus of the politicians' energies. But what they got instead was a process which might have sold itself as a continuation or a consolidation of the *peace* process but wasn't: it was a *political* process. And it eventually became divorced from the former peace process, so much so that can anyone now imagine the Shinnars or the DUP sitting down together in committees to determine how to consolidate and extend the peace process? They are doing nothing of the sort: they are part of a political

But what people got instead [from the politicians] was a process which might have sold itself as a peace process but wasn't: it was a political process.

continuation of what went before – the old struggle for dominance – except without the violence. So a process in which the grassroots had some say has now become remote from them. That is why the type of meetings, discussions and workshops that Harry and the Messines project organise are so vital. And, as Harry always reminds us, we need these discussions now more than ever before.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] I agree with you, and Peter Robinson acknowledged that last year, when he said that he and Martin McGuinness eventually realised that there needed to be a peace process inbuilt on the ground. And that he was personally too slow to acknowledge that. But the other thing which happened was that the community sector was also damaged by that process and it became ‘clientist’: whichever politician you were aligned to was seen as the route to get funding and resources. And that became very destructive. But, yes, at one time there was a whole buzz in many areas, there was a lot of discussion about what type of society we wanted. But it seems as if that ground has been burnt away.

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[**Michael Hall**] The community sector, as it developed in the immediate wake of the Troubles, is in so many ways in retreat. Whenever I started publishing my pamphlet series, over twenty years ago, I compiled a ‘distribution list’ of all those community groups I had forged links with – and it also included individuals like the UDA’s Andy Tyrie and Sinn Féin’s Tom Hartley who would pass the pamphlets on to their associates – and that list was 120 strong. Within ten years it was down to 80, then it dropped to 60, and now less than 30 of those original community groups still exist. Okay, a lot of groups went into decline naturally, and some just couldn’t get funding. But others were caught out by the new ‘equality’ legislation, which, although well-intentioned, meant that many people who had given years working voluntarily for their local community, now found themselves unable to apply for some of the new funded community posts, because they had never acquired qualifications. And community groups were afraid of being in breach of equality legislation if they didn’t select the most qualified applicant. And to me this was detrimental to the voluntary sector.

[**Eamonn Lynch**] What is happening now is that the two main political parties

are just so far ahead. Trevor Ringland said in the newspapers recently: don't vote for Sinn Féin or the DUP. I would go along with that 100%. But who is going to do that? There have to be groups talking about how do we move on, how do we get society back together again. The peace walls are still there. Do you hear about people marching or clamouring: 'Let's get the peace walls down!'? You don't. Or more integrated education, my hobby-horse? No.

What decent fair-minded person would be against integrated education? If you want to transform society here, you have got this problem over religious bigotry, so how do you attack it? You get children when they are very, very young and just bring them together in a natural environment, where they can see they don't have horns. And make sure that the people who teach in the schools don't spout the bigotry which you would have got from some Christian Brothers in the past, and all the rest of it, and people giving their slanted versions of Irish history. And nobody is mentioning that. If you mention that to Gerry Adams and Sinn Féin they would look at you. They're got their own wee hobby-horse, the Irish schools.

[Who] would be against integrated education? You get children when they are very young and bring them together in a natural environment, where they can see they don't have horns.

[Michael Hall] Eamonn, your mention of Trevor Ringland appealing for people not to vote for Sinn Féin or the DUP reminds me of the local government elections of May 1985. I was then a member of the Rathcoole Self-Help Group and for those elections the group decided to form a 'political' party. It was called the 'All Night Party', and its banner across the entrance to Rathcoole estate read: NO MORE SHITE! VOTE ALL NIGHT! And our candidate, Hagar the Horrible, went around Rathcoole wearing a Viking helmet. And our election manifesto 'promised' to rebuild Stormont in Rathcoole and make it an all-night disco, to hold the next Olympics in Rathcoole, and to tilt the earth's axis so as to give Rathcoole more sunshine. And the DUP and the UUP were absolutely livid. They actually said to us: "You people are bringing politics into disrepute!" To which our response was that the sectarian and corrupt politics of Northern Ireland were a sad joke to start with, so why not make it official.

But, more maliciously, the DUP also made a public allegation that the Self-Help Group members were all Cathal Gouldingites. Of course, the local UDA,

some of whom knew that Goulding was a former leader of the IRA, became extremely concerned about us. I had to take a delegation from the Self-Help Group over to UDA headquarters in Gawn Street in East Belfast to meet with Andy Tyrie. And Tyrie said: “Look, I know you lads are okay, I’ll clear up any concerns on the ground. And keep doing what you are doing: our local politics needs to be shaken up.” But that’s the way the unionist political parties have *always* confronted any type of perceived threat in their own midst – by using the old scare of ‘republicans or reds under the bed’.

[**Tim Plum**] Last night on the Shankill they were doing that...

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Tim, tell us what happened last night.

[**Tim Plum**] The meeting took place in the Spectrum Centre, against a backdrop of the largest Union Jack I have ever seen in my life, it was huge. So, you’ve got Nigel Dodds, Sammy Wilson, Billy Hutchinson, Frank McCoubrey... It was about uniting Unionism, and there were three hundred-plus people there, it was packed. Sammy Wilson talked a lot about Brexit details. Nigel was only there for a few minutes as he had to run up to another event on the Shore Road. But they talked about culture, they talked about blaming republicans, Sinn Féin, they blamed Alliance – everybody but themselves. Integrated education. In the room it was the same rhetoric that they had used before, exactly the same stuff, about Ireland is coming to get us, and the EU is coming to get us, and we can trust nobody but ourselves, and we must vote Unionist. No matter who you vote for, vote Unionist; although the actual implication was that (a) everybody is saying just vote DUP, and (b) as most of the stage is DUP, the implication was: just vote for us.

And then meanwhile the rhetoric *outside* the room was: we don’t trust the DUP. This is a loyalist working-class area, right, and they don’t trust the DUP. But in the actual meeting, when they had the chance to ask questions, they didn’t have a go at the DUP, they went at Sinn Féin, everyone but the DUP. And I thought that was a very interesting dynamic. We were there for two hours, but once they started to talk about issues which were *not* part of the ‘blame game’ – housing and other

But in the actual meeting, when they had the chance to ask questions, they didn’t have a go at the DUP, they went at Sinn Féin, everyone but the DUP.

things – the crowd just filed out; they lost the audience at that point. I think it was Nigel Dodds who said something along the lines of ‘our identity is everything’, and I really wanted to get close to the stage and ask: “Nigel, you mean it is above family and God? Is your British identity so important that it supersedes everything else?” And there was a concern expressed about the implications of the trade side of Boris’ deal. But my argument is: you had *no* information *before* when you voted ‘Leave’, you didn’t care what it was then, so why do you care now? It doesn’t matter what the information is now, you have already voted.

[**Michael Hall**] Tim, you referred there to the identity issue. You and I both know Joe Camplisson and the linkage he made with John Burton, the Australian conflict resolution practitioner and academic who was brought over here to assist Joe in the early days of the Troubles. Burton always made the point that where there is an *identity-related component* to any conflict, you cannot go for compromise or even accommodation, there *has* to be a *resolution*. He said that people often treat ‘conflicts’ as if they were ‘disputes’. For example, if your neighbour wants his hedge to be 12 feet high and you want it to be 4 feet, you could both perhaps reach a compromise by having it 6 feet. But *identity-related* problems are not amenable to compromise. And even if it looks like a compromise has been reached, the identity-related issues are still bubbling away under the surface, and at some future date could easily reignite. Burton held that conflict resolution (as opposed to conflict management, conflict transformation or conflict reduction) requires a *process*, not of negotiation or compromise, but of *assisted self-analysis*, in which the parties to the conflict are brought to a collective understanding that what they are facing is a *shared problem*. † Burton also believed that for a process of conflict resolution to have any realistic chance of success, it had to involve the parties at the extremes, for only through them could you get sight of the depth of the conflict, and only through their direct engagement would it be possible to engender *movement towards* resolution.

[**Tim Plum**] Yes, I have noticed here that within the working class, there isn’t the battle over class identities, there is the battle over national identities.

† A tentative attempt to bring a Burton-type approach to our own conflict is described in Island Pamphlets nos. 107, 108 and 109, under the theme ‘A Process of Analysis’. Pdfs of the three pamphlets can be downloaded from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/islandpublications/index.html>.

[**Harry Donaghy**] You mentioning the large Union Jack brought back a memory. In 2009, 2010, we organised a series of talks under the title ‘Citizenship and Identity: Can we let the Past imprison the Future?’ It took place over a weekend, and Billy Hutchinson, Dawn Purvis, Roy Garland and others were there. Now Roy had once been an ardent Paisleyite when the whole thing erupted over Taoiseach Sean Lemass’ visit here to meet Captain Terence O’Neill. And Paisley was at the front throwing snowballs, and going on about this being a sell-out. And a big rally was held at that time in the Kings Hall, and Roy had pictures – he was doing a slide show as well – and he said it had the biggest Union Jack he had ever seen, it covered near the whole of the Kings Hall! And that was the backdrop to people talking about politics: we are under threat, our identity is under threat. There is a certain psyche that can be touched when ordinary people, with no particular axe to grind, have other people stand up in front of them and raise fears about their identity, their Britishness... it is almost beyond rationality.

There is a certain psyche that can be touched when ordinary people have other people stand up in front of them and raise fears about their identity.

[**Michael Hall**] One note of caution. Sometimes people assume that many people, on both sides, are easily swayed by the divisive messages given out by our assorted politicians. But at another of Harry’s meetings – held recently in an Orange Hall in Armagh – Gareth Porter, who works with people whose loved ones were murdered by republican gunmen, said that even within the victims group that he works with there is an amazing openness and generosity of spirit. And, furthermore, when he saw that, despite the brutality and the trauma inflicted on both sides here during thirty years of Troubles, most people – on all sides – were prepared to put any emotional response to the side and vote for the Good Friday Agreement, he said that convinced him that there is a deep residue of decency still there. And he also said that if certain people had not had this unstoppable desire to unite Ireland through the gun, he is convinced we would be in a far better place, and that could only have come about if both communities had showed an equal generosity. That generosity is there. The problem is that the fears which have been hyped up get in the way, and, as you have been saying, Tim, today we are looking at the same fears that were there in 1969. Our theme today – *Loyalism and Unionism under Threat?* – that could have been the title for that meeting you were at yesterday.

[**Nadia Dobryanska**] As I have been listening to you all I was wondering: is this still a history meeting about 1969, or is this a meeting about today's Brexit context?

As I have been listening to you all I was wondering: is this still a history meeting about 1969, or is this a meeting about today's Brexit context?

[**Eileen Gricuk**] I feel the same when I read the subject title. Are we talking about this fifty years ago, or is it about today – because is it still so present. But Brexit gives the excuse to hype it all up.

[**Tim Plum**] We are seeing this around the world today. Where certain groups of people are oppressed, or perceived to be oppressed, and then something has to relieve the pressure. The flag protests did it in 2012, now we've got Brexit doing it. So, something will relieve the pressure. A sixteen-year-old girl got up at the meeting and asked: are the actions here going to continue or is this just going to peter away? And I am thinking: it's going to peter away, because as soon as the Withdrawal Agreement is signed there will be some initial reaction, then people are going to accept it, because you can't change it. And so Unionism will go back into its cocoon.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] I am not so sure, because if that generosity that you talked about, Michael, was there for the Good Friday Agreement, we are burning that space out. And internationally that is what is happening, we are playing identity-politics all over the world, and in a way, yes, it is interesting that the 'Loyalism and Unionism under Threat?' theme could apply to then *or* now. But you don't get that sense in the South of Ireland, among Protestants or Unionists, do you? Is there something here that is a manifestation of something which is linked to the formation of the state of Northern Ireland?

[**Harry Donaghy**] The village of Drum is known as the 'only Protestant village in the Republic of Ireland', and a few years back we took about thirty people there for a discussion, and most of them had done time in prison for various organisations. We had a panel of local people explaining to us how they get on, including one girl who had been very active in that community, and cross-community as well, and was not only a fluent Gaelic speaker but was very much into the bands culture. And she said: "We, my family, the people I know in Drum, are all proud citizens of the Irish Republic, we feel at home here. But we

understand as well that eighty-ninety years ago when the line was drawn and people found themselves in a place where they didn't want to be, we understand that as well."

Another point I would like to make. What worries me is that things might be going backwards. When I think of all the opprobrium that Billy Hutchinson, Gary McMichael and others once came under from the big hitters in Unionism... it was unbelievable. Take Ken Wilkinson, who is unfortunately ill at the moment, and was one of the founders of our group the Fellowship of Messines. Well, the night the Agreement was signed Paisley had a counter march – it wasn't much of a march – but the cameras were there. And he retreated into a portacabin for a press conference. Well, the voice you hear shouting at him to "Tell the truth; what about that meeting! Do you want me to tell you the brand of coffee we were served, or describe the wallpaper!" That was Ken. And those people who were members of loyalist paramilitary groupings and would have spent a considerable amount of time in jail, or were in the new parties the UDP and PUP, were actively saying: the only way we are going to get things done here is by sitting in the room talking politics with our former political enemies. And they were castigated for that.

Hutchie arranged a meeting back in August there with the head of the Good Relations Unit of Belfast City Council, to say that the Messines Project would be good to deliver a new programme. We want to talk about the War of Independence, we want to talk about the 1920s, we want to talk about Partition, the establishment of the two states, and we want to examine the Irish Civil War and its aftermath: how minorities who were left behind reacted and how they were treated. And that was all very forward-looking. But I always get worried that when the tribal dog-whistles blow it is all part of an effort to try and make people fall back into line. Now, Billy would be for women's right to chose, for same-sex marriage, and he was a Remainder. But people like him will be under terrible pressure when those particular buttons are pressed. I'm sure there was no-one said to the DUP at that meeting last night: how did you bollocks that whole thing up? How did you find yourselves climbing into bed with people who couldn't find this place on a map if you put it down in front of them!

I always get worried that when the tribal dog-whistles blow it is all part of an effort to try and make people fall back into line.

I can remember back in the time when the ceasefires were on and ex-prisoner

groups were all talking to one another, and there was a bit of a buzz – as Deirdre said – and – as Michael said – there was also a generosity of spirit. I am worried that we are losing that generosity, and that we’re in as dangerous a place now as maybe we were when the conflict was coming to an end. That is something we all need to take really seriously. Last week I was up meeting some loyalists who are now community workers, and they were saying: we thought it was basically done, it was all over, there was no need for anything, we only have to do granddad duties now. And one of them said to me: “What’s scary is that some of the young people who are coming to our project are actually hungry to get involved – when is our turn going to be to get into the fight? And these kids weren’t even born when the ceasefires were called, and are now militant like you wouldn’t believe.” It is scary.

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[**Michael Hall**] Some Irish republicans and nationalists seek to dismiss the Protestant working class as irredeemably reactionary. Yet one academic, when he compared instances of new political thinking within the Protestant working class and within the Catholic working class, found that Catholic working-class thinking was generally circumscribed by the goal of a United Ireland, whereas the Protestant community had often been forced by circumstances to move outside their normal comfort zone. For example, the (short-lived) talk of an Independent Ulster, the *Beyond the Religious Divide* document, the *Common Sense* proposals, and so on. And we don’t always give them credit for that. But the question now is: how do we resurrect that? How do we say to progressive elements within the Protestant working class that there is still a vital role for you within your community? But they can’t do it alone, and one of the problems I see is that there are very few people on the nationalist/republican side offering support. Indeed, some of them seem to be glad that the Protestant community finds itself on this current precipice.

[**Harry Donaghy**] The failure of 1798 has always haunted republicanism: how do we convince our fellow countrymen and women – whose particular identity isn’t one of a Catholic Irish Nationalist – how do we go about talking to them about an envisaged future, a future country, a future in which they have a full part to play? Now, this has gone on for generations, and it is still ongoing today.

[**Nadia Dobryanska**] You just mentioned 1798 in the context of Republicanism. But in Ulster these were the Protestants. And that is the biggest thing in my Irish History classes, this is something that freaked everybody out: how come that the most radical revolutionaries of Irish History before the 20th century were Presbyterian Protestants! This whole thing of republicanism being quite Catholic which is not as true as it might look at first sight. I still feel quite weird about us talking about three centuries of history all in the same meeting!

[**Harry Donaghy**] Nadia, the Republicanism that I would adhere to comes from that Enlightenment tradition. And, if truth be told, the first people to do it in such a critical manner in the whole of Western Europe were the English themselves. They led the way when the will of the people came up against absolutism and the Divine Right of Kings, England fought a civil war....

[**Nadia Dobryanska**] Now we are definitely going back 300 years ago...!

[**Michael Hall**] But, Nadia, to many people here that was only yesterday!

[**Nadia Dobryanska**] Past history is so striking here!

[**Harry Donaghy**] Talking about going back in history... I can recall – this was just after the ceasefires were called and the process began which eventually led to the Good Friday Agreement – and these interactions were taking place, when former protagonists were arranging to meet and talk to one another... anyway, at a meeting on the Falls Road, this guy said: “Let’s be honest, the first armed Republicans on this island were Cromwell and his soldiers!” There was a collective heart attack in the room! Especially among the Faith & Fatherland Catholics among the audience! But that Enlightenment period was what many of these Presbyterian republicans were adherents of, as they were in America, and in France. But Nationalism has always had a longer lineage in Ireland and, if truth be told, it has always trumped over that radical and progressive legacy.

Nationalism has always had a longer lineage in Ireland and, if truth be told, it has always trumped over that radical and progressive legacy.

[**Michael Hall**] Belfast at that time was called the ‘Athens of the North’, because it was the centre of radical thinking and politics. And then you had the likes of Saintfield-born Francis Hutcheson and the Scottish Enlightenment, and the

influence that had on progressive thinking here.¹² And that, in turn, had a profound influence on the American revolution.¹³ So, yes, it *is* strange that the Protestant community has been to the fore in many periods of radical politics – whether in Ireland or outside Ireland – yet is now seen to be stuck in a retrogressive bind.

[**Nadia Dobryanska**] I look at the nationalism and populism which is rising in my own part of the world – Eastern Europe – in places like Hungary, for example, and I was wondering how it looks here. And there it is. I have been learning about Unionism in the 18th century and 19th century, how enlightened it was, but now it is using the rhetoric of the far-right, and is quite a worry.

[**Harry Donaghy**] Yes, it is worrying, Nadia, and it is sad, for in the 1780-90s there were more copies of Tom Paine’s *The Rights of Man* sold in Belfast than anywhere else in the world.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Can I close this discussion now, and thank you all for your contributions.

12 Francis Hutcheson was once described as “probably the most influential and respected moral philosopher in America in the eighteenth century.” One author has also argued that the phrasing of the Declaration of Independence was due largely to Hutcheson’s influence.

13 The Pennsylvania Line, the famous force of regular troops, was of primarily Ulster descent and Washington said, “If defeated everywhere else I will make my last stand for liberty among the Scotch-Irish of my native Virginia.” A Committee of the House of Commons was told that Ulstermen made up half of the rebel army. The Official Declaration of Independence was: written in the handwriting of Charles Thompson from Maghera; printed by John Dunlap from Strabane; given its first public reading by the son of an Ulsterman, Colonel John Nixon; and among the signatories were the following, all either born in Ulster, or born to Ulster parents: John Hancock (President of the Congress), Thomas McKean, Thomas Nelson, Robert Paine, Edward Rutledge, George Taylor, Matthew Thornton, and William Whipple. The great Seal of the United States – an eagle holding arrows and a branch – was designed by Charles Thompson after a Congressional design committee consisting of Franklin, Jefferson and Adams, broke up in disagreement. John Rutledge (brother of Edward) chaired a committee of five states which drew up the U.S. Constitution. According to Alexis de Tocqueville, the U.S. Constitution bore Rutledge’s “personal stamp. One man made it; and it was Rutledge”. Ten U.S. Presidents were of Ulster descent: Andrew Jackson, James Knox Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses S. Grant, Chester Alan Arthur, Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley and Woodrow Wilson.