

*Heritage, History & Memory Project*  
*(Workshop 5)*

**Civil Rights – Then and Now**

*A presentation by*

**Dr. Seán Byers**

*followed by a panel discussion*

*then a Q&A session*

*compiled by*

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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.

In 2018 the Association initiated its **Heritage, History & Memory Project**. For the inaugural launch of this project it was decided to focus on the period of the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement, and the early stages of the ‘Troubles’. To accomplish this, it was agreed to host a series of six workshops, looking at different aspects of that period, with each workshop developing on from the previous one.

The format for each workshop would comprise a presentation by a respected commentator/historian, which would then be followed by a general discussion involving people from diverse political backgrounds, who would be encouraged to share not only their thoughts on the presentation, but their own experiences and memories of the period under discussion.

This pamphlet details the *fifth* of those workshops. The theme of the workshop was ‘**Civil Rights – Then and Now**’. The guest speaker was **Dr. Seán Byers**, who works for Trademark, a community-relations organisation based in Belfast, and officially the anti-sectarian unit of the ICTU. His background is in Labour history, particularly in the inter-war period and into the sixties.

The event was held at Armagh Orange Hall. Dr. Byers’ presentation was followed by a panel discussion which in turn led into a Question & Answer session facilitated by **Martin Snodden**, assisted by **Sarah Haughey**.

The panel members were **Joe Garvey**, **Dermot Kelly**, **Dan MacKay** and **Gareth Porter**.

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

## ***Introduction*** by **Harry Donaghy**

Hello, ladies and gentlemen. You are all very welcome here tonight. I want to give a brief background as to who we are. The International School for Peace Studies was set up in Messines in Belgium in 2001. Messines was the location of a pivotal First World War battle in which Irishmen of all persuasions, and from all four provinces, took part, and where many of them also died. I was one of the first small group of individuals – there were twelve of us – to go through a year-long course in peace studies, graduating in June 2002. The purpose behind us entering the course was to assist in the building of relationships in our own divided society, utilising the experiences of our grandparents' generation at the turn of the twentieth century, not only drawing on the fact that many of our grandfathers had ended up in uniform fighting in the First World War, both unionists and nationalists, but also drawing upon their experiences of the political situation back in Ireland.

The individuals who made up that initial group found the experience at the School for Peace Studies so worthwhile and so potentially constructive, that we decided at the end of it that we wouldn't just shake hands, have a beer, wish each other well, and then disappear, but that we would try to replicate the learning process back home, by constructing programmes of a similar nature that could hopefully be of use to people from across our divided communities.

People used to think that we were solely a World War I commemorative society. But we used our grandparents' experiences in the early twentieth century as an avenue into an ever-broadening discussion: exploring and debating with one another the whole concept of identity, citizenship, nationalism, and all that goes with that.

As each of the programmes unfolded we consulted with those who had taken part and asked: what would you like to do next? And very early on in those conversations it was clear that at some stage the history that we would be dealing with wouldn't just be from our grandparents' era, it would be concerned with the lived experience of the generations who are still with us today.

We called this particular programme *The Long 60s: Heritage, History and Memory*. Its purpose is to examine the social, economic, and political history of

the turbulent period encompassed by the ‘Long 60s’, beginning with the development of relationships between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland in the aftermath of World War II, and concluding with the Sunningdale Agreement and the Ulster Workers’ Council Strike of May 1974.

The process of engagement across a range of identities and allegiances is aimed at creating opportunities to solicit contemporary responses from individuals and their communities of interest, as to how they were affected by the events of the period. The individuals, groups and organisations involved will be invited to outline any perceived omissions in the already-gathered research, and provide their corrective to the historical record, in a series of project workshops and seminars, with the aim of separating opinion from the evidence, and myth from reality.

This is number five in the series of six workshops planned within the programme, each workshop comprising a thoughtful and hopefully challenging academic presentation, followed by a panel discussion, and finally a question & answer session with an invited audience. Tonight’s speaker is **Dr. Seán Byers**, and his presentation is entitled ‘*Civil Rights – Then and Now*’.

But first, a few words from Sarah:

**Sarah Haughey:** I have just been appointed the Community Relations Officer for REACT in Armagh, just across the Mall, and you are all very welcome here this evening. As Harry said, Dr. Seán Byers is going to make his presentation, and then we will have our panellists engage in a discussion afterwards. On our panel tonight we have

**Joe Garvey** chairperson of Richmount Community Development Association

**Dermot Kelly** former member of the People’s Democracy

**Don MacKay** cross-community worker and former Parades Commissioner

**Gareth Porter** social justice campaigner and victims’ advocate

Our *facilitator* for tonight is **Martin Snodden**, an ex-prisoner who has worked closely with the Messines Project, and who is now an international trauma and conflict resolution worker.

## *Civil Rights – then and now*

**Dr. Seán Byers**

What I'm going to try to do tonight is sketch out a longer historical context to civil rights in Ireland over the past century. The purpose is to identify some continuities and dislocations in the civil rights movement or movements over the past hundred years, taking a broader view than perhaps has been the case during the current period of commemorations.

There is broad recognition that the Northern Ireland civil rights movement had a pre-history which included:

- the realignment of republican thinking after the military failure of the IRA's Border Campaign, including the establishment of the Wolfe Tone Societies;
- the early direct actions that led to the establishment of the Campaign for Social Justice and, later, the Derry Housing Action Committee;
- the election of the Wilson government and lobbying efforts of the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster, coupled with changes in the wider economic context which facilitated improved Anglo-Irish and North-South relations.

The conventional narrative is that these factors combined with the radicalisation of an upwardly mobile Catholic middle class – the beneficiaries of the post-war welfare state and 1947 Education Act – to bring about the emergence of a civil rights movement in the 1960s. This is the account which has been popularised and provided most of the focus for historical talks, seminars, panel discussions, exhibitions and public commemorations that have been organised over the past year or two.

However, a number of historians have suggested that this narrative fails to adequately account for the political orientation and 'much broader appeal of the civil rights movement', with Emmet O'Connor emphasising the role of socialists and their 'ulterior purpose of uniting workers'. With regards to organised labour, it is well-established that the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU (NIC-ICTU) and the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) sent joint deputations to Terence O'Neill, to lobby for civil rights reforms. People will probably be aware of the role played by activists such as Betty Sinclair, who was elected to the first NICRA executive as a Belfast Trades Council representative.

The late Bob Purdie, in his seminal text *Politics in the Streets*, has done much to trace the complex origins and development of the civil rights movement, identifying labour as one of the key strands of activity that began to converge in the 1960s. But historians such as Chris Loughlin in particular argue that the role of organised labour and the political left in the struggle over issues of democracy and civil rights stretches back much further, to the establishment of the northern state.

Trade union and left-wing political activists were among those who were targeted by, and fought against, the Unionist Party's 'police and political order': a set of anti-democratic and coercive practices designed to curtail the civil and political liberties of those deemed to be opponents of the state. As we know, these practices included electoral gerrymandering and the abolition of proportional representation. What is rarely acknowledged is that the abolition of PR in local government was a response to the growth of nationalist *and* labour political forces in the 1920 and 1922 local elections. The redrawing of electoral boundaries and move to a majoritarian first-past-the-post system for Stormont in 1929 was at least partly designed to halt the progress of the NILP after William McMullen, Jack Beattie and Sam Kyle had won parliamentary seats four years earlier. NILP leader Kyle was among those to recognise that this formed part of a strategy to establish a condition of permanent Unionist dominance over nationalism, while making it difficult for the labour movement to secure anything more than limited political representation. Significantly, he anticipated a long struggle to redress what he considered a grave injustice:

I venture to make a prophecy. The denial to the minorities of Northern Ireland of their just share of representation will prove a continuing and irritating sore. There will be no rest until justice is done to the minorities. You cannot yet see all the consequences of a denial of justice.

Kyle was to lose his seat as a result of these changes in 1929, but the demand for electoral reform would be taken up by his party in subsequent decades, eventually becoming a central pillar of the official civil rights movement.

The Unionist Party also had a number of wide-ranging powers which it used to suppress political dissent. The Special Powers Act, introduced as an emergency measure in 1922 and made permanent in 1933, was the primary means through which the Ministry of Home Affairs and RUC did this in the inter-war period. This

was a time of growth and great potential for radical labour politics, and the Unionist regime responded by clamping down on the activities of trade unionists and the political left. The Special Powers Act was used to prohibit labour meetings and demonstrations, and to routinely arrest and intimidate activists, while the long-serving Minister of Home Affairs Dawson Bates increasingly relied upon exclusion orders to ban key figures from the territory of Northern Ireland. In 1936, the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) published the findings of its inquiry into the use of Special Powers, roundly condemning the ‘abundant evidence of the daily use of such powers against individuals active in the working-class movement, particularly on its left wing’. But despite its damning conclusion that this constituted ‘a permanent machine of dictatorship’, the NCCL report received no attention in the British Parliament, and the use of Special Powers continued unabated into the Second World War period.

This suppression of civil and political liberties was replicated in the South with the introduction of equally far-reaching measures such as the Public Safety Act (1931). As a result, these issues formed a key site of contestation on both sides of the border, providing the focus for campaigns instigated by trade union bodies, the NILP, Communist Party and the republican left. These forces would subsequently coalesce around the *Irish Democrat* newspaper in 1937, which was an attempt to promote broad cooperation around the defence and extension of democracy internationally and at home.

As with the labour movement, there was also a strong continuity between women’s struggles of earlier periods and the civil rights campaign of the 1960s. Many will be familiar with the names of Sinclair, Angela McCrystal, Sadie Campbell, Ann Hope, Madge Davison, Patricia McCluskey, Brigid Bond, Bríd Rodgers, Bernadette Devlin, Edwina Stewart, Inez McCormack and Rebecca McGlade, given their prominent role in those historic events. There are also the masses of unnamed women who McGlade described as ‘the backbone of the civil rights struggle’, opening up their homes to marchers, feeding and lodging them as well as participating in the marches themselves.

In many ways the story of women’s struggle over the past century *is* the story of civil rights in Ireland, where Church and state have long combined to reproduce the conditions of women’s subjugation and resist attempts at progressive social change. The late 1960s and early 1970s are most remembered for the official civil rights

movement and outbreak of the Troubles. But this period also witnessed the emergence and consolidation of 'second wave' feminism, a broad movement encompassing a variety of women's campaigns for social and economic equality. Within a few short years there was the advent of the pill and the contraceptive train protests, the successful fight for equal pay, the establishment of Women's Aid centres across the island and the removal of the marriage bar in the public sector, north and south. These various struggles represented the continuation or resumption of radical labour, left republican and feminist struggles against the conservative norms and restrictive laws that had been embedded in the two states of Ireland since their foundation.

Many of the women involved in these campaigns were supportive of, or directly involved in, the Northern Ireland civil rights movement. In some cases the demands of the women's movement overlapped with those articulated by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). For example the demand for 'one family, one house' was simultaneously a civil rights issue, a class issue and something that held great import for women as the main caregiver in the home. But working-class women in the North did not confine themselves to campaigning for decent housing, an end to sectarian discrimination or around any set of issues prioritised by NICRA.

From this point on the women's movement would continue to grow in number and strength, even though the task of women's organisations was made acutely difficult by depressed economic conditions and the escalation of violence and sectarianism. The 'Century of Women' online history project notes that 'women were not homogenous and adopted a wide range of political positions and attitudes to the ongoing conflict', with some enlisting in paramilitary organisations. But it was women who were most successful in sustaining relationships during the darkest days of the Troubles, as they worked to promote women's rights and economic justice. Cross-community cooperation was to be found not only in relation to issues of gender equality and sexual discrimination but also around things like the introduction of internment without trial and the thorny question of prisoners' rights at the time of the hunger strikes, giving rise to an anti-strip searching campaign that would last into the 1990s. This cooperation led to the creation of various women's networks and establishment of women's centres in working-class areas, while the struggle for reproductive justice would eventually coalesce with trends south of the border to form a mass, island-wide movement.

The need for an expanded view of civil rights is therefore essential, particularly if we are to fully appreciate the role of women and organised labour. If we broaden out the discussion further, to look at some of the issues that are being fought over now, we can see that they were always in the background for the duration of the Troubles – initially marginalised in wider policy debates and overshadowed by the violence, but gaining visibility thanks to changes in society and the efforts of successive generations of activists.

The modern LGBT rights movement in Northern Ireland emerged as a response to the Victorian legislation that criminalised homosexuality. The North's first LGBT organisation, the Gay Liberation Society (GLS), was established in 1971 to demand law reform. This was closely followed by the establishment of organisations such as the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA), a broad-based social movement which modelled itself on NICRA and aimed to promote equality for the North's LGBT population. Organisations such as these were crucial in encouraging people to come forward and get involved with a budding, non-sectarian LGBT movement.

While the LGBT movement was non-sectarian, opposition to decriminalisation also appealed to forces on both sides of the divide. The rise of the LGBT movement was met with political resistance from the Catholic Church and Protestant fundamentalists such as Paisley, who gathered some 70,000 signatures as he launched his campaign to 'Save Ulster from Sodomy'. The campaign for legal reform led by LGBT activists finally succeeded in 1982 after a landmark case, brought to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) by Jeff Dudgeon, forced the UK government to impose decriminalisation on Northern Ireland – 15 years after the relevant legislation had been repealed in England and Wales, but a full decade before decriminalisation in the South.

As John Nagle has argued, this 'did not represent a mandate for equality'. When the National Union of Students Lesbian and Gay Conference was held at Queen's Students Union in 1983, it was picketed by a joint protest of the DUP and Catholic Church. As hostility grew and the NUS came under pressure to cancel the event, the delegates received an invitation from the community in West Belfast to attend what would become known as the Queer Céilí at the Marty Forsythe Social Club in Turf Lodge. This story has since been captured in a Dominic Montague play that was recently premiered by Kabosh theatre group in the very place where those events unfolded.

The continued hostility towards gay people ultimately led the LGBT community to take the step of organising in public spaces, which eventually culminated in the first annual Belfast pride event in 1991. From a small parade involving just 50 people, Pride would grow into a much broader-based movement characterised by alliances seeking to promote equality and diversity in a society polarised along ethnonational lines. The LGBT movement even situated itself as a peace process actor, evidenced by the official theme of the 1995 Pride celebration: ‘Time for Peace, Time for Pride’.

There are various other strands of campaigning and struggle which could be located within a longer and broader view of civil rights on the island. For instance, we await a comprehensive history of Ireland’s largest and oldest minority ethnic group, the Traveller community, its experience of structural racism and the impact of Traveller-led activism on the politics of the two states since the 1960s. Similarly, much work remains to be done to better integrate the lived experience of migrant communities into the historiography of twentieth-century Northern Ireland.

Time does not permit a full discussion of these subjects. But finally, and very briefly, I want to look at the issue of the Irish language. This is not something that was taken up by the official civil rights movement or widely regarded as a civil rights issue – until recently that is. But a number of points are worth making. The first is that the Irish language movement was always a diverse movement encompassing various approaches, discourses and competing ideological perspectives. Camille O’Reilly has developed a useful typology of discourses related to Irish language policy in the North: decolonising, cultural and rights-based. The decolonising discourse is overtly political and most closely associated with Irish republicanism. By contrast, the dominant strand of the cultural discourse is concerned with keeping the language separate from party politics and promoting the use of Irish in its own right, beyond the narrow conceptions of nationalist and Unionist. Finally, the rights-based discourse is typically used within to promote the Irish language through existing institutions and ‘acceptably defined parameters of debate’.

Although the language came to be heavily associated with the decolonising, political project of Irish republicanism, it did not take any special prominence within the republican movement until the Hunger Strikes, the birth of the *Jailtacht* and the rise of Sinn Féin. In the 1960s and 70s, the Irish language activism concentrated in working-class nationalist areas was of course influenced by the political context and had adversarial relationship with a state whose dominant

forces were inimical to the development of the language. But initiatives such as the establishment of the Shaws Road Gaeltacht in 1969 and Bunscoil Phobal Feirste in 1971, for example, lacked the subversive political rhetoric and objectives of later campaigns. Above all, the West Belfast pioneers were concerned with restoring Irish as a living language, in a way that might serve to ‘repair a deflated confidence and spirit’ within the community. The use of cultural and rights-based discourses survived alongside the growth of a decolonising, party-political perspective represented by Sinn Féin, and have gained prominence in recent years as objective conditions have changed in their favour.

There are a number of observations that are worth making about these and other hidden dimensions of civil rights. The first is that the movements under discussion not only have a longer history but also had a clear all-island dimension beyond the traditional republican agenda for a united Ireland – one which sought to address the civil rights deficits and conservatism of both states. There is a legitimate criticism to be made of NICRA that it did not do enough to establish closer links with other rights-based movements in the South, thereby giving expression to its view that the politics of reaction were not limited to the Unionist Party. But taking a longer and broader view of civil rights encourages acknowledgment of the reality of rights-based problems and struggles island-wide.

The second point to make is that campaigning and progress around civil rights issues, understood in its broadest sense, has tended to come in fits and starts – or in ‘waves’ as the literature on social movements would have it. These waves have sometimes been sparked by one event or incident, by the momentum garnered by a sporadic campaign, by the resistance encountered to progressive change, or by sudden changes in objective societal conditions – sometimes it is all of these. It is important to make the simple point that where we stand today – whether it relates to the core demands of the civil rights movement or issues such as women’s and LGBT rights – is built on the foundations and traditions of past struggles that are sometimes absent from classical narratives. Again, the wider perspective presented here allows us to draw out stories that advance a more complex and rounded understanding of civil rights in Ireland.

If we fast-forward to today, we can see in hindsight that the peace process helped create the context for the growth of a rights-based discourse. The language of rights and concept of ‘parity of esteem’ were at the core of the Good Friday Agreement and

have become inextricably bound up with debates over how transition in Northern Ireland should be managed. It is in this context and that of fast-moving change in the South that the practical pursuit, if not the slogan, of ‘British rights for British citizens’ has been renewed in some quarters. In our time it is the demands for marriage equality, Irish language rights and abortion reform which have gained mass support, disrupting old allegiances and political certainties. The campaigns for marriage equality and abortion reform have developed into vibrant cross-community and all-island movements, while there are signs that the Irish language is no longer seen as an exclusively Sinn Féin issue but rather something which is more broad-based. The demand for a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights has also returned, more than twenty years after its enactment was pledged as part of the Good Friday Agreement and five decades after it was originally proposed by NICRA. As in 1968, it is the dominant political forces within Unionism that have been most resistant to change. But this time around they have alienating much greater numbers of people from a Protestant background, particularly those of a younger generation.

In some respects, we can see that progress has been limited or even gone into reverse, or that the attainment of legal rights and protections has not necessarily led to equality in practice. The material conditions of migrants, the Traveller community and women are all a testament to this. In each of these areas we see the persistence of long-standing structural inequalities and conservative gender norms. Article 41.2 of the Irish Constitution reads: ‘The state recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The state shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.’ In other words, it remains the official position of the Irish state that women should engage primarily in the gendered tasks of cooking, cleaning, caring, etc, both to the detriment of their leisure time and participation in the labour market and without due recognition that such tasks themselves constitute important forms of labour.

Housing was a core concern of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement and has returned to become one of the defining issues of this generation. We are in the midst of a housing and homelessness crisis north and south. The number of households registered as statutory homeless in Northern Ireland has doubled to 20,000 since the restoration of devolution in the year 2000. The Housing Executive,

one of the standout positive achievements of the civil rights movement, is also under pressure, as the Department for Communities pushes ahead with its plans to transfer public housing stock to housing associations.

There also remains the problem of segregation in housing: 90 percent of working-class housing estates in the north are segregated; 95 percent in Belfast. In places where there are serious housing pressures, such as north Belfast, we can see one community's claims for housing to be distributed according to need run up against another community's asserted right to maintain its territory, identity and sense of security. Here austerity and privatisation have combined with the legacy of the Troubles to present significant challenge in meeting genuine housing need on a high quality, mixed tenure and socially integrated basis.

In the area of employment, it can be observed that the workforce is now evenly balanced and workplaces more mixed than they had ever been – and in that sense the fair employment legislation enacted since 1976 has served its purpose. But the material conditions of employment have worsened in terms of the growth of low pay and precarious work. One in four workers in Northern Ireland earn below the living wage; underemployment is rife across the private sector in particular. Ireland north and south also has some of the most regressive trade union legislation in Europe, which has negative impacts on the standard of living secured by workers. Although employment law is a devolved matter in the North, the Executive parties have over a period of twenty years failed to bring forward legislation that would guarantee trade union recognition and promote the establishment of proper collective bargaining rights.

Some might argue that issues of economic equality and socio-economic rights have fallen off the political agenda as a result of the mainstreaming of identity politics and emphasis on certain specific rights. It is hard to argue with this contention when one looks at the prevalence of low incomes, child poverty, homelessness, health inequalities, the gutting of public services, the devastating impact of welfare reform – and the absence of red lines around any of those issues. The question is whether a positive universal narrative around the right to a decent home, free education and healthcare, affordable childcare, secure and well-paid work, gender equality, the commons and a sustainable environment – all the building blocks of any decent society – could be constructed as part of a broader rights-based agenda, or would it be destined to suffer from the peculiar dynamics of this place.

## Panel Presentation

[**Joe Garvey**] Let me give you my own background. I am Chairperson of Richmond Community Development Association just outside Portadown and I have been working with that community group, mainly unionist, but over time we have gradually reached out to other communities, both ethnic minorities and Roman Catholic or nationalist areas, and it has worked very well. It is interesting, Seán, that you started off some distance back in time, and you go on a sort of continuum from the labour movement on through the sixties, women, LGBT, travellers, migrants, and so on. In Northern Ireland we always think of the Civil Rights as being based in the sixties. But the sixties was a time of change. There was a movement in America for civil rights: did that have an influence here? But also the 1947 Education Act; there were people coming through the system who were educated as a result of that act, there were middle-class Catholics coming through. And perhaps one of the problems of the Civil Rights Movement was that it *was* the middle-class Catholics: what about the people on the lower strata? What are *their* rights?

And to me there is a major a problem today with young people: young people who feel they are not part of the system, they're not getting anything out of it – and it wouldn't matter who was in charge – and we are starting to see that in places like Derry/Londonderry. And I see it in Portadown. When young people, and it is mainly in working-class housing estates, get into their own little area they see very little outside it for them. And so that is something I think, in terms of rights, we need to look at: what are we doing for those young people? In civil rights terms, are we as a society doing anything positive for those young people? Or are we just demonising them: 'Ah, that's just them'. They're not really availing of the education system; they're going to remain on that bottom strata. Politicians will use them, be it for cannon-fodder or whatever.

The other thing on Civil Rights I always thought, despite all those buzz words like 'parity of esteem' and 'shared identity'... what I found with the groups I am working with, is that we don't know our history. People have been taught a very blinkered view of their own history and that is how they have formed some of their opinions.

***We don't know our history. People have been taught a very blinkered view of their own history and that is how they have formed some of their opinions.***

Another thing: I have said this in the summer time with all the events around Portadown and Belfast, with bonfires: How many bonfires do you see in middle-class areas? [*Audience*: None] How many bonfires do you see down in the village of Richhill? [*Audience*: None] Right. We have young people getting into trouble and bother, and who is orchestrating it? Is it *only* themselves? I think there's a civil rights issue there.

The Irish language issue... I have been numerous times down with Linda Ervine in East Belfast, and you can see a Protestant community embracing the Irish language, so it is not the bigger issue. However, when I was growing up my mother used to say to me – and somebody tried to teach me Irish for three years, unsuccessfully – “Irish language? Where will that get you?” Now, that was a *pragmatic* viewpoint; the *cultural* element of it all didn't come into it. It was: ‘What use is it for getting you a job?’

You're right about housing. I have a long background in housing, and I remember talking to Austin Currie, who would have been one of the founders of the Housing Executive. I think he was actually minister at the time, and he was also the person who squatted in the house in Caledon. And he said that the Housing Executive was one of his better creations, and so it was. But the Housing Executive don't build any more houses; they haven't built any for years – the Housing Associations build them. And to my mind a lot of it is ‘opportunity building’: find a site and we'll build there! Whereas the Housing Executive looked at an area, bought land, and built houses *where they were needed*. And the amount of public sector housing being built now is ridiculously small to meet the need. And that causes conflicts. People have been on the waiting list for years. They even see migrants coming in and taking their place on the list, and so on.

The women's situation. Sometimes I often wonder: yes, there is a lot of benefit to women, but did they shoot themselves in the foot at times, particularly when they wanted the pension age increased to 65? There can be drawbacks in some civil rights. And, by the way, you see that bit of the Irish Constitution you quoted: is that a good or a bad thing? I know the way you put it across was that it implied that the place of the woman is in the home, minding the husband, minding the kids and all the rest of it. But should a woman *have* to work if she has got young kids? I see young kids being literally farmed out because economic necessity means that that woman has to work.

***I have been numerous times down with Linda Ervine in East Belfast, and you can see a Protestant community embracing the Irish language, so it is not the bigger issue.***

And it ends up she is paying a small fortune in childcare. So there is an issue there.

I would contribute two things on civil rights. We have a right to know our own history. We also have to be wary about organisations that seek to manipulate people. But yes, we definitely need to think about rights, equality, especially for young people in working-class areas.

[**Dermot Kelly**] I am certainly not going to dissect Seán’s delivery. But a few things came to mind. One was in his view of the labour movement’s involvement in civil rights. I have a more jaundiced opinion on that, because in my lived experience the trade union movement stepped back from the civil rights struggle. And that was because of the influence of reactionary elements within the shipyard and within the unionist workforce, whereby it became more important to placate the majority, as you might call it, than to be seen to be at the forefront of a struggle that has proved historically, and to many at the time, that it was straightforward and a correct policy to support equality among our community here in the North. That we were equal citizens, and that should not have been an issue that should have been fought on, or it should not have been an issue the trade unions should step back from. And that to my mind was a serious flaw at the outset of the mass movement. I do recall a number of people that I came across in those days who were members of the Labour Party, but they wilted on the stem fairly quickly, and that didn’t help matters historically.

***[The civil rights] struggle has proved historically, and to many at the time, that it was straightforward and a correct policy to support equality among our community here in the North.***

I agree with Joe that the Civil Rights Movement was seen to benefit middle-class nationalists within the North, and their policies prevailed to some extent. But I also recall that in the movement that I was part of – the People’s Democracy – we were involved in a march to Dublin from Belfast, which was attacked in Lurgan, and attacked on the southern side as well, and we were also involved in a march from Kinloch in County Leitrim to across the border to County Fermanagh, all to highlight the fact – in both cases – of the lack of certain civil rights issues, both North and South. We were also involved in supporting a cement strike in Drogheda, which had an island-wide effect on the whole building industry and had led to a lot of claim-jumpers who had come in to benefit from the strike by bringing in cement from Scotland and England. Those are only three aspects of civil rights issues that were relevant and

were fought for and were maybe overlooked during that momentous time.

In relation to women, I recall that as part of the support for the women who were in Armagh Jail in the early seventies there was a massive demonstration outside the jail on International Women's Day in the mid-seventies, with people coming from all over Europe to support the demand that women in Armagh Jail should not be strip-searched. Those are just maybe little facets that don't appear on the historical agenda, for they are not mainstream. But at least they show that people were reaching out to wider issues, than just the issue of some sort of comfortable middle-class request by the civil rights movement here in the North for equality on certain issues.

**[Don MacKay]** Hello folks, I'm from Lurgan. I come from a Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist background. I have served in the military, I have been in the emergency services. Just to correct something Seán said about our MLAs, who haven't worked for 1000 days. He said they didn't pass any employment legislation. Well, yes, they did – one piece. And you know what that was? They all agreed to pay themselves £19,000 even if they didn't take their seats! I grew up in a small village, and a lot of my friends were Roman Catholics. Very good friends. Then the Troubles started. If I hadn't grown up in a small village, and was from Londonderry/Derry, or Belfast, where most of the things were happening, I might well have gone down the road of becoming involved in loyalist paramilitaries, instead of taking the road which I did, which was to join the military. That's the way things were. When I joined the military a lot of my Catholic friends didn't want to know me, I can understand that. We have now reconciled.

But then I started to educate myself, with degrees and all that sort of stuff. And I said to myself: you know, as a Protestant our community have been used and manipulated, in particular by the Ulster Unionist hierarchy. Protestants all thought that they had something. Well, they had nothing more different than their Catholic neighbours where I grew up in my village. We all had the same: outside toilets, etc. But I have to admit, there *was* civil rights abuses, and human rights abuses, in the likes of Londonderry/Derry and Belfast. I mean, both Protestants and Catholics didn't have the vote...see this business that it was only one-sided, it wasn't. Both Catholics and Protestants didn't have votes. You had, if you were a 'big-house' Unionist, who maybe had a business, and then you might have had six, maybe twelve votes.

***Both Catholics and Protestants didn't have votes. You had, if you were a 'big-house' Unionist, who maybe had a business, and then you might have had six, maybe twelve votes.***

So, that was my experience of Civil Rights. Then, when I joined the military I seen some of my friends being blown to pieces and stuff like that. And I thought: do civil rights not work both ways here?

You take the likes of the incident that happened in Caledon where a Protestant lady was given a house over the head of a Catholic family.

There is nobody here will say that that was right; that was wrong. Housing should have been allocated fairly. People should have been treated with respect, and I think that if the Unionist hierarchy had treated the Catholic people with a wee bit of respect, which they required and needed, I don't think we would have gone down the road we did. There wouldn't have been 3000 deaths. If people are treated with respect then they buy into the system.

But the way things are today, it is going slightly the *other way* now. There is a perception among the Protestant community that *they* are now becoming the second-class citizens. And we need to learn from history, because if you treat people the way they shouldn't be treated then they will rise up... and I hope I'm wrong. But what I'm saying is: civil rights are justified.

Lastly, there is also evidence that the Civil Rights Movement was infiltrated by Republicans. I will give you an example. One of the organisations within the Civil Rights was the Derry Civil Defence Association. They had 44 members; they were dovetailed into the Civil Rights Movement. Out of those 44 members nine of them became members of the Provisional IRA. So, nobody can tell me that they weren't infiltrated by republicans. That's not taking away from the rights that Roman Catholics needed, but the Civil Rights Movement *was* infiltrated.

[**Gareth Porter**] I enjoyed Seán's talk, from a number of perspectives. It certainly triggered off the historical stuff as someone who has always had the history of Ireland as a favourite topic, and wondered when I left Queen's University in the late seventies why major aspects of Irish history had never been touched upon. Take the 1641 Rebellion, it was a holocaust of the Ulster people, but across the board, and I couldn't for the life of me get my head around why it was never really touched upon.

I remember being a mid-teenager when things were just starting to kick off in the late-sixties... And I was thinking: where was *my* head in that period, in the '67-'69 period? I was known at school as 'Commie', because 'one man. one vote', 'disband

***When I joined the military I seen some of my friends being blown to pieces and stuff like that. And I thought: do civil rights not work both ways here?***

the B-Specials', and the demands that were coming forward at that time, certainly seemed to me as, yes, I can go along with that, they seemed to be fair.

And despite all that we had gone through during the Troubles, when I saw so many of the Unionist population voting in favour of the Good Friday Agreement, and I saw that sense of forgiveness, of coming together after what had been a terrible time, I could not but think that if, in the early sixties, had the killings not started when they did, I think as a community we would have got through a very difficult period without it ever escalating to where it got to.

For me, as a young teenager, the murder of that first UDR man in Lurgan changed my attitude completely, from being someone who had been radical against my own people, to someone who really thought: you know what, knowing a little bit of Irish history, this whole thing is going to blow. And I think the difficulty that we are in now, even in Europe and in the United Kingdom in particular, I think is now one of the most dangerous that I think I have seen since that period of the Civil Rights movement.

And I actually said that about two to three years ago after the Referendum in the UK. I remember thinking that we're going back to the 1640s in the United Kingdom: it's going to be Parliament versus the People, versus the Crown, or Remain versus Leave. And I can see clear parallels... recently the historian David Starkey also talked about the parallels: when you have a parliament which opposes the will of the people you have a problem.

I think the Stormont government, right from its establishment, could have showed more wisdom and compassion. But, in fairness, they were also a government that were coming to terms with a whole new world for them: coming after the Irish Civil War, coming after World War II, the failed IRA campaign of the fifties-sixties, and I don't know what *I* would have done if I had been a Terence O'Neill, or a Chichester-Clark or whatever. I would like to think that I would have been more compassionate and would have made the decisions that needed to have been made.

My background of the last twenty years has been one of working with victims. And I think that when you talk about civil rights, the greatest civil right of all is the human right to life. And I have been proud of the last twenty years that many of the people that I have worked with, who lost

family members and were bereaved as a result of the conflict, have still the goodwill to reach out to those would have been seen as traditional enemies, some of whom had

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inflicted the worst the world can put upon them.

But I wonder today, looking at the current list of demands that seem to be insatiable. And that is where I would commend parties like the Workers' Party. I could never understand why more people coming from an ordinary Roman Catholic background couldn't vote for a party like the Workers' Party, who were obviously keen lobbyists for change, who were socialists, who wanted to see things done in the right way from the early seventies, which was a position they had taken at the worst days, when the chaos was at its worst.

And, Seán, I loved your breakdown on the Irish language. I have long been a person that loves the Irish language, but not as a legislated Sinn Féin demand. And I think that even if the DUP were seen to be giving way on that, it would be just seen as another list of concessions. Fifty years on from 'Disband the B-Specials!' 'One Man, one Vote!' And I think there is a difficulty, in that when you get to the point where you push a people into a corner – as I believe the nationalist people were, and felt in the late sixties – I think the unionist people today are feeling *their* backs to the wall, and when your backs are to the wall, you don't always make rational or compassionate decisions.

And for me it was the loss of life, and the rise in the killings and the murders that led us into a terrible, terrible period. And it's how we address where we are now, to make sure that that does not take place again. There has been a great amount of good work going on on the ground for a long time, yet at the minute I am worried about all the rhetoric I am hearing. Those of us who have been around from the start of the early days of the Troubles know all about the horrific nature of war and conflict.

I feel for the younger generation, and one of the things that we tried to do in our organisation was not to keep the wounds open, but to find ways of healing, whether it was going to visit places where there is even greater poverty than what we have here, greater problems than what we have here, and where there is greater trauma. We need to take the situation out of our own bubble and look beyond and be constructive and be positive.

But I think today looking at civil rights then, and civil rights now, the danger is that they become seen as another list of demands. And for me that's what needs to be countered. I agree with you: the women's issues, the equality issues... I don't

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know of any Roman Catholic today, and I say this as an Ulster Protestant, that hasn't the same equality of opportunity, equality of electoral voting, equality potentially of housing – and I too came from a house with an outside toilet – equality of life, and equality of religious belief. But I think that the danger is, when we look at then and look at now, I hope it will not be seen as another list of demands. Because that is where the danger lies, and a community feeling surrounded, cornered, hearing all the 'Our Day Will Come!' slogans being voiced, that push people to think: what does this all mean? where is it all going? And one of the things I am proud to say here is, coming from a Unionist/British perspective, I don't believe the Ulster/Northern Ireland Protestant people, British people, will ever vote for people that have been involved in killing their fellow Irishmen and citizens of the United Kingdom. That's where we need to challenge those who have that mindset, because they have done it once, and to be seen to have prospered leaves us open to a return to a very difficult sad situation.

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## **General Question & Answer session**

[**Martin Snodden**] Now is *your* opportunity, in terms of have you anything you would like to say, to comment on, with regards to what Seán had initially presented, or indeed what the panel members have spoken of from their particular points of view?

[**Audience member**] One of the first things that I would like to say is: 'Roman Catholics' come from Rome; Irish Catholics come from Ireland. We're just 'Catholics', and if we have to have a label then we're 'Irish Catholics'. Another thing is, from the women's perspective: I worked for quite a few years for Women's Aid, and it mightn't be such a bad thing for men if the pension age was raised for women. Maybe what should have been done with the pension age for men was it brought down. But historically women tend to live longer than men, so I don't know why men have to work five years longer than women before the pension. I have never had a problem going out to work and supporting myself and my family. Another thing, I really take issue with it, this idea that children are 'farmed out'. They're not. There's no man I'm sure 'farms

out' his children to someone to look after them, while he goes out and makes the living, at the same time that his wife goes out and becomes the breadwinner for the family...

[**Audience member**] They're left to the grandparents!

[**Audience member**] Yes, that helps out tremendously as well! But it's still the perspective: should a woman have to work, should that be her right? That's a parental issue, that's a male and female issue. And I certainly never paid out a fortune for childcare; I shared it with my husband. So, I think that's why women, across the board, could identify with each other, and maybe did work better, and formed relationships that withstood a lot more, because they looked at the broader perspective.

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[**Audience member**] Unionist governments over the years did not treat people right. I feel that if civil liberties had've come in more back then we wouldn't have had this. I just feel that with better civil liberties, better civil rights, equality, we would now be looking at things a lot differently. And I think a lot of unionists would say the same now.

[**Dermot Kelly**] Could I just interject here. The question of rights is not a concession, and I disagree with the use of that word 'demands'. In a democratic society, those rights are there for everybody, and therefore it should not be a question of now these so-called rights or 'demands' are moving in the wrong direction. And that there's a danger of trouble coming down the road from the unionist community because they see more rights being given away. I think the use of that type of language is dangerous, and I feel that we should all agree that rights are universal, and that in any sane society, we shouldn't have to ask for them, they should be legislated for everybody. And I just feel that what I was involved in in the sixties were just demands.

And I had started off by coming from work in Belfast and seeing students being attacked by the police outside the BBC on the Dublin Road, and I was horrified. I decided that what the students were voicing were legitimate civil rights demands. And later I decided that I was going to take part in the civil rights march in Armagh. And I saw a lawful march being stopped, and I saw the people who were involved in that lawful march, on their dispersal home, being met by the police at The Shambles, where they were batoned! The stewards were batoned, the very people

that Don now says in Derry became members of the Provisionals. These people were stewards in Armagh and I saw them negotiating with the police in relation to a bus being attacked on Cathedral Road, and they said that they would handle it. The police disagreed, and the way they disagreed – they just produced their batons and beat the stewards! And I, in horror, run up an entry, hid in the rafters of a house and looked down, along with several others, as the police came up that entry, went looking for people, and beat them senseless below me. So that was my baptism into the civil rights movement you could say. And from then on I was adamant that I was never again going to be terrified, or inhibited, or intimidated by the forces of the state.

So, as a result of what I saw, state violence led me into situations where I was opposed to the state in a militant fashion. So I am just saying that all stemmed from the fact that we did not have an equal society, a universal society. The universal rights of people were not recognised, and they should be. There should be no question of talking about concessions coming the wrong way down the track this time round. It is not a concession to give people their rights, it's a duty of government.

[**Gareth Porter**] Dermot, just to clarify a point: I wasn't implying that there was going to be violence from Loyalists. That might have been said in the media, but that's not where I am coming from. In fact, in the last twelve months most of the threats being made is about there being a return to violence by republicans if there is a hard border.

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[**Martin Snodden**] So in terms of this sense of universal rights, do we all agree that everybody has a right to have rights? [*Audience: Yes*] I would like to ask the panel: whatever happened to the proposed Bill of Rights that was meant to come into place? I can remember all the working groups in the early 1900s working on producing a Bill of Rights. But it didn't happen, it got lost somewhere along the way. And that has led to some of the present difficulties that we're experiencing in our society. Does anybody know what happened to that Bill of Rights proposal?

[**Dermot Kelly**] I am only guessing here, but I seem to recall that there was something within British constitutional laws that was a fly in the ointment to the passing of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. There was something that was contradictory and it didn't then happen. The issue did not end, but it sort of got stuck there.

[**Martin Snodden**] It got stuck in with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; they were active on it, trying to get something happening, and then it just seemed to slide off the table somehow.

[**Joe Garvey**] Maybe that suits politicians? It's a bit like our current politicians on Brexit – does it suit them to be out of Stormont while Brexit negotiations are going on? But there was something you touched on, Don, you said that the Protestant community had been used for a long time. And we must remember right from the creation of Northern Ireland, up until the seventies, every prime minister and major politician in Northern Ireland was from the landed gentry. You had Brookeborough, O'Neill, and so on. They wanted to protect their interests. The first person to come from a trade background was Brian Faulkner, he was the first prime minister who wasn't part of the old establishment. So you must remember that these politicians, these leaders, wanted to maintain their way of life. They were ultra-conservative, they had no time for ordinary people, and it didn't matter whether it was Catholic or Protestant, you just kept them down, by whatever means. So there was a civil rights deficit for *all* Northern Ireland; admittedly the Roman Catholic population probably came off worse.

[**Audience member**] I would like to know whether rights are equal. Is the right to life equal to the right to march? There has been a great deal of talk about the right to march, but to me, coming from Portadown, that right has taken precedence over the right to life. I can use the example, as a relative of the late Robert Hamill, that his life was sacrificed for the right to parade. And there were several others like Adrian Lamph, Michael McGoldrick, the Quinn brothers outside the town... To me, all rights are not equal; I think in this country the right to parade and the right to march has taken precedence over the right to life.

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[**Martin Snodden**] So, the right to life is important, the right to parade, and the right to protest... it's about different rights; isn't that what we are talking about here, about having those rights, and honouring other people's rights?

[**Audience member**] Living together is the big thing. Don, you lived in a small community and everything went pear-shaped during the Troubles. What the hell happened between our communities!

[**Don MacKay**] I actually played Gaelic, I wasn't a bad Gaelic player, but two of my

friends told me that a local priest had said to them: “What did you bring him in here for?” I said: “What did he mean?” And they said, “He said to us: he’s a Protestant, he shouldn’t be here.” Now, when I then joined the military my good Catholic friends didn’t want to know me, because I was seen as the ‘enemy’. It has all changed now, we’re all friends again. But that’s the times we lived in, that’s the way things were. Was it right? No. It was wrong.

[**Martin Snodden**] I think that’s important in terms of: let’s recognise that the past is the past, is back there, and while we have memories of it, we also want to have a brighter future, where rights exist for everybody within that future, and moving forward. The difficulty sometimes is that we get involved in ‘whatabouteries’, and we don’t want to be involved in the ‘whatabouteries’.

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[**Don McKay**] The lady there mentioned Portadown. Now, I was in the loyal orders in Portadown, Portadown Ex-Servicemen's Lodge, and walked there. It is my view, and I say this as a member of a Loyal Order, that *nobody* should be marching where they are not wanted.

[**Audience member**] Yes, but you get to your place of worship, to Drumcree Church of Ireland. What you are disputing is the return march. Now, I know that is ancient history now, but there were far too many people lost their lives over that whole issue of Drumcree.

[**Don MacKay**] I agree with you, nobody should be marching down the Garvaghy Road, which is probably 100% nationalist. And they will never go down there again. But why would you *want* to march? Would I want IRA or Sinn Féin to walk up by my house? No, I wouldn’t. So, what you want for yourself you must give to other people. So, I agree with you, people shouldn’t be walking where they’re not wanted.

[**Audience member**] And I don’t agree with the bonfire in Edgarstown, in Portadown, because depending on whatever way the prevailing winds are blowing, you needn’t put washing out the next day in Obins Street, because it will be ruined with all the ash blowing in our direction.

[**Audience member**] I was going to say something about that too. With all the talk about climate change and what we’re doing to the environment is it not time for *all*

bonfires, on any side, to be kept small? I object to bonfires from a health point of view; the elderly people who are living beside it, some are asthmatic. Now, I'm not picking on any one side, but we're so much into climate change – they're protesting about it in Trafalgar Square at the minute – so if we are going to be 'British' are we going to accept the rules that they might bring in regarding emissions, for cars and so on? For surely that will have to be looked at with bonfires too.

**[Don MacKay]** The issue of bonfires will have to be revisited. I spent thirty-one years in the fire and rescue service, and was at the scene of many bonfires in Belfast and other parts of the Province. Playing jets of water on people's houses, so that they wouldn't go on fire. So I know the dangers, of smoke and toxic fumes and all that. However, and I am not making excuses, you have got to consider that part of the Protestant community's culture is to have bonfires. But, yes, it has to be controlled. There has to be leadership shown that they don't build them up to the sky.

**[Audience member]** I am worried about climate change. There has to be a consensus. Look at that wee girl, Greta Thunberg, she's only fourteen but she is showing real leadership. Everybody has to show that concern for climate change.

**[Don MacKay]** But you know how that is perceived from.... and I'm not saying it is right or wrong... from the Protestant community, that 'they' want to destroy 'our' culture. That's how it's perceived. And you have to be careful about that, because we all have to live in this country together. But I don't think that bonfires should be sixty feet high.

**[Martin Snodden]** This weekend I am facilitating a group of ten different bonfire committees, who are looking at all this, and are working towards creating a code of better practice, within what they would see as their rights as well. And sometimes their rights become the victims of other people's rights, and they are exploring all of those issues, to try and bring about positive change. So it is good that they are, internally, trying to monitor and progress the expression of their right of expression of their culture, just as everybody else has the right of expression of *their* culture.

**[Audience member]** Many people used to smoke, until they were told that it was bad for your health, and people stopped smoking in bars, etc. But surely bonfires are just as dangerous to your health? You're saying lighting bonfires is 'traditional' but so was smoking, and the law had to step in and say enough is enough. There was toleration for people who smoked for years and didn't know how bad it was, until they were

educated. But how long is this education going to go on regarding the bonfires? It seems to have gone on and on and on. Tradition or no tradition, it is dangerous!

And not just from a health point of view, but from people's houses. How can you accept having firemen out hosing people's houses down. People put their life's work into their houses, and how can people in their own community stand back and let this be done to those houses – old people's houses, young couples' houses – in this day and age. Enough is enough. I am a nationalist, a Catholic, but if it was done in our areas I would like to think that I would go out onto the streets and say: enough is enough. This is my neighbour, this is my friend, look what you're doing to her house, to whatever she has worked for for years! I can't understand how people in the Protestant community are not standing up and saying the same, that enough is enough – it might be our 'tradition', but look what you are doing to these people.

[**Audience member**] Also, what about the Irish language? When the Queen visited Dublin, at the state banquet she had gone to the bother of learning a few words of Irish – *A Uachtaráin, agus a chairde* – to greet President Mary McAleese and the other guests who were gathered there. If the Queen is prepared to recognise the Irish language at that level, why do those who profess such loyalty to the British Crown not allow us to have an Irish Language Act?

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[**Don MacKay**] If I wanted to learn Irish I can go to learn Irish. I could go to Linda Ervine's place in East Belfast. Or down at Kilwilkie. There's nothing to stop me learning Irish. But why do you need to have legislation, because you can speak it when you want...

[**Audience member**] But they have it in Wales. Every signpost in Wales is in Welsh and English, they're bi-lingual. They have signs in Gaelic Scots in Scotland. So why can we not have it here in the North of Ireland?

[**Martin Snodden**] We're not going to resolve that here. But it is good to get your questions out. But I do want to move us one, for I am conscious of the time...

[**Audience member**] I don't think Protestant people should be afraid of civil rights. I don't think the nationalist people would let it happen for any people *not* to have their rights. Because for years *we* didn't have equal rights, and I don't think any of my friends would say that Catholic nationalists don't want the Protestant people to

have rights, just as I would like to think that the Protestant people would like nationalists to have *their* rights. We need to have equal rights for everyone.

[**Martin Snodden**] I'm glad to see that this is a lively conversation.

[**Audience member**] I just wanted to go to something that Joe said, which was about rights for children. My feeling is, and I know it has already started, but if it was put widespread that all children went to integrated schools – not just at primary level but right up. I think that's where years down the line real change will happen.

[**Audience member**] I have four children and they all went to an integrated school.

[**Audience member**] I have four children and three of them are now living in Australia, my fourth is also talking about emigrating to Australia. Two of my children have applied for residency over there, and I am not encouraging them to return to Northern Ireland. I myself am planning to retire there. I am 53 and in my eyes very, very little has changed here. I think we're all just suffering the lies of higher orders; that we've all suffered it all our lives, and will continue to suffer, and until the children grow up thinking differently, I don't think there will be big change.

***We've all suffered it all our lives, and will continue to suffer, and until the children grow up thinking differently, I don't think there will be big change.***

[**Martin Snodden**] Are you proposing an integrated education system?

[**Audience member**] Absolutely. Okay, it's people's right if they want to practise their religion, but I think it's another method of control.

[**Joe Garvey**] I totally agree with you about integrated education. But when we are talking about rights, we also have to recognise the rights of people who want their child educated under a certain system.

[**Audience member**] But that's not the *child's* right, it's somebody making decisions for them.

[**Joe Garvey**] You do reinforce a point I made, that it was people of my generation who were involved in the Troubles. It wasn't the young people; we blame them for everything. But I do think we have to recognise that there is something not very nice going on with our teenagers and young people in terms of continuing a conflict in Northern Ireland. And that is a real worry. I think that is what our politicians and the

rest of us should be focused on. That's where you are going to get your activists from, your trouble... those young people will end up in jail. And we should be the ones to make sure that that doesn't happen. Who is going to end up in jail? Will it be the middle class? No.

[**Audience member**] I agree with you. The children that I see that you're talking about are the children who are being influenced by the hardliners, on both sides.

[**Joe Garvey**] My daughter once said to me: "Daddy, we're very lucky", and I said, "Why's that?" "Well", she said, "we have been brought up in the countryside, and we have Catholics and Protestants and everybody round us. But if I had been brought up in the middle of the town, I could have been involved." And that is a worry to me.

[**Dermot Kelly**] There was a time when this event tonight wouldn't have been possible: the very fact that we are here, in an Orange Hall, discussing the future, and what we have come from. Things are not lost, and we are aware of what went wrong before, and how power was held in the hands of a clique, a landlord clique, that ran the state to suit itself. We now know these things and, thankfully, most of the generation of people who have come through this struggle know it, and hopefully we will be able to move from that point on.

*There was a time when this event tonight wouldn't have been possible: the very fact that we are here, in an Orange Hall, discussing the future.*

[**Martin Snodden**] I think that's a really good point, in terms of where we're at now. We're having this conversation in an Orange Hall; we're having a civil conversation. We're not saying everybody agrees with everybody else, but what I think we're saying is that people should have rights, and one of those rights is having the right to disagree over things. So, what I want to do now: I want to invite Seán, if he has any final comments before I bring in Harry, and then Sarah to close.

[**Seán Byers**] I suppose I will just pick up where Dermot left off. There are lots of positive things happening at the moment, not just in terms of those conversations, but with the younger generation as well. They are leading the way, in terms of climate change and so on. They are leading a mass movement for what will need to be the biggest transformation of society we have ever seen in the next ten years. So they are leading the way in many respects. There are plenty of reasons not to be so despondent about the future. There are also dangers in the current moment, because we are living with the hang-over of the past. We can see the contours of the culture war in many

places. There is a sense of loss, and being left behind, particularly in working-class unionist areas. You see disengagement from official bonfire management schemes. You see flags being used increasingly as a means of marking territory and intimidation, and an increasing number of contentious parades, and so on. And young people are being drawn into dangerous and destructive activity, both in working-class unionist areas and in their mirror-image in working-class republican areas like in Derry.

So where change is being seen as the erosion of Britishness, there is a danger. I can see in certain sections of nationalism that now the shoe is on the other foot and ‘now it’s our turn’, and if ‘they’ don’t want to get into the programme, well, we’ll just leave them behind. So there is a responsibility on the part of those within the nationalist/republican community who have influence, to engage in a spirit of generosity, from a position of empathy for those communities.

And likewise there is a responsibility on political unionism – I don’t know whether we should expect it from the DUP, or for the DUP to show better leadership around some of these issues. I think, for example, around the Irish language the best thing the DUP could have done would have been to say ‘it’s not a big deal; legislate for it and we’ll move on’. But they *did* make a big deal of it and they painted themselves into a corner and they got people’s backs up, they riled people up and now they’re struggling to find a way out of that situation. So I think better leadership could have been shown.

Also, you have seen the possibility of a United Ireland being discussed, and there is growing acknowledgement amongst the people who are engaging in those discussions that the rights and identities of people from different backgrounds and traditions should be accommodated. But I would say that not enough has been done to spell out how exactly that would be done. Either within the context of Northern Ireland, or the context of the Good Friday Agreement, or within the context of any future constitutional or political arrangement. I think there is an onus on people who have influence within these discussions, within the nationalist and republican community, to try and engage with people at the margins, by which I mean working-class unionist communities. Because my sense of it is that many of those in working-class unionist communities aren’t on the same trajectory as the nationalist community, but also those within the liberal middle-class sections of unionism, and there is a real danger of them being left behind. I think it is important that these sorts of conversations continue, and that we try to broaden the constituencies involved.

**[Martin Snodden]** Just to come back again to where we are now. We are in this Orange Hall, we’re having this discussion... we have come on so very very far, from

the dark old days whenever you would have been driving home and would have been seen searchlights overhead. So let's not forget the journey that we *have* taken. We certainly have lots of challenges in front of us, but if we face them *together* there's hope. I want to thank you all for your honesty tonight in having this discussion and debate. And that has to be welcomed; we have to welcome all those different perspectives on things and try and find accommodation. So, well done everybody; I am going to hand over to Harry and then Sarah, who are going to bring this to a close. Thanks very much.

**[Harry Donaghy]** Although the Good Friday Agreement, and various talks and processes eventually brought the armed conflict to an end, as a society we are all obliged to *continue* talking. Indeed, more than ever, we need to maintain that civic discourse between one another. There are lots of problems facing us, and will be more, but we must remember that we can learn from generations who went before us. My grandfather was a proud Irish nationalist from the Falls Road who fought in the British Army in the First World War, came back to an Ireland that was about to be partitioned, but he never had a sense of bitterness against those Protestant friends of his who he fought in the trenches alongside, in France and later in Palestine.

Again I remember too conversations taking place in Long Kesh, when we were all at one stage reluctant guests of Her Majesty! But the longest conversation ever to take place in the compounds, between the armed groupings involved, was a question smuggled in on an A4 sheet of paper: 'Is this as good as it gets?' That's a debate we are all still having today. If we can influence younger people then we can say: look, *we* were told in the bad old days that you will never have peace in this country, you'll never stop the killings, you'll never do this. But we did. We need to continue that debate, and it's important that groups working on the ground, like REACT, like HURT, and all of the others, that those civil discourses be maintained.

If *we* can, in our own small way, help facilitate those discussions and exchanges, along with others, then we are certainly committed to that. And hopefully this will not be the only time we visit your city here in Armagh. I would like to come back again, and have further discussions and exchanges. So thank all of you for taking the trouble to come along tonight and for all of your contributions, as well as to Seán and all of the panellists, and the audience here who have contributed to this particular discussion.

**[Sarah Haughey]** I just want to thank everybody for coming, for their input – Seán, the panel members, everybody who came along – and we could talk all night no doubt. Hopefully we can continue on. I hope you all get home safe.