

Arthur Williamson 1/2005

The video starts off by Carl Milofsky asking Arthur Williamson for his permission to be videotaped. Arthur then gives his permission and Carl introduces Arthur as the head of the center for voluntary action studies at the University of Ulster. Since there is a bit of lapse between the audio and the video, the timecode will be based off of the audio.

3:00 Arthur begins by asking the audience if anyone has been to Northern Ireland before. He says that he is a historian, so he will be talking a bit about the history of the conflict.

4:15 Arthur: "I just thought I'd start by raising a flag about the importance of historical understanding for what you see, hear, read, and observe here in Northern Ireland." So he starts off with a story. "A few years ago I was attending a conference in the United States and I stopped to spend a few days with a friend who is a professor of mathematics at Norfolk, Virginia. Because we had a day off, he took me down to Jamestown, which was very interesting to me to see some of the artifacts and presentations. Imagine my surprise when I went into the interpretive center at Jamestown and the first exhibit I remember seeing was of a little town called Moneymore which is about 30 miles from here. It showed the fortified walls around that town which the colonists erected when they came to Northern Ireland from England sometime in the early 17th century."

5:40 Arthur: "Why was this in Jamestown? Why were they displaying this? They were displaying it because there was a set of assumptions and lines of communication between people who were travelling from England to colonize what is now the United States and people who were travelling to Northern Ireland to colonize here. There were very close links between those colonial social entrepreneurs at the time. So it's interesting as well that the plan for a city named Londonderry was drawn by the same man who drew the plan for Philadelphia, Thomas Rainsin. I could go on talking about links, but what I want you to understand is that the background to the issues that we confront on a daily basis in Northern Ireland is geopolitical and it is historic. But it was part of a movement of colonization that took place at the 17th century."

6:50 Arthur: "My family has lived in the county Armagh for about 300 years. They came from the north England from a town called Wigan. I came across recently a book which is a very ancient history of the county of Armagh. And this book is fascinating because it gives a list of the grants of land that were made to the first settlers who expropriated the land on which the native Irish people lived during the plantation. And we have here the list of the allocation of 16,500 acres to 12 English people of note who received land under contract from the crown in Northern Ireland who brought with them settlers to settle that land. Some of whom were my ancestors."

"And here we have a list of the settlers and what they were expected to do. And I'll read you an example because it brings up the conflictual nature of the settlement. 'In the precinct of the Fuse (an area in the county Armagh) allotted to Scottish undertakers, Henry Atchison possessed 1,000 acres. Here was a stone and clay bon (a castle or a fortified house). The house was 140 feet in length and 80 in breadth and with 4 flankers (a sort of fortification). In the

interior was a house partly formed of stone and lime and partly of timber. There were 19 tenants on the land, who with their sub-tenants, mustered 30 armed men and were actively employed in agricultural pursuits.' The man who was given that thousand acres and who colonized it, one of his descendents is Nick Aitchison, who will be speaking to some of you on Monday. Nick has an interesting past, and I thought it would be interesting to put the Northern Ireland settlement in context."

10:10 Arthur: "There was a victory in 1607 following which the land was divided and the earls who had formerly been in control as the rightful owners of all of the land, had lost it. They sailed away to France and that left the opportunity for the crown to split that crown up to something like 600,000 acres among Scottish and English settlers who came here. And in some senses, the northern part of Ireland is a colony which many people feel is without a mother country."

11:05 Arthur: "I'd like to mention the recent elections. And I brought with me the Irish Times for Saturday the 7th of May, 2005 (he holds up a newspaper). This gives a pretty graphic picture of the configuration of seats in the Westminster Parliament after those elections which saw the highpoint of the zenith of polarization between the two communities in Northern Ireland with Sinn Fein on the Republican side becoming the main political party and elbowing SDLP into the shadows. But nothing was as dramatic as Ian Paisley's victory as he describes it at the official Unionist Party which used to be the main Unionist Party of Northern Ireland or the Ulster Unionist Party. So we saw great polarization take place. A trend which has been there for 20 or 30 years."

12:15 Arthur: "So that's a little bit of the background." He then holds up a book that him and a couple others recently put together called *Two Paths One Purpose*. "It's a study of voluntary action in Ireland north and south. In some ways it's a landmark in the sense that it gathers up and presents a huge body of research in relation to voluntary action and nonprofit organizations in Ireland north and south."

13:30 Arthur: "Now one of the interesting that the book draws attention to is the bifurcation that existed in Irish society long before the partition of the country in 1922. One of the things we do is look at the question of religion, ethnicity, identity, and how and how the two communities which make up the island of Ireland. The Protestant community which is focused mainly in the northeastern counties and the Catholic community which is throughout the country. How those two communities develop their own, distinctive approaches to the question of voluntary action. That is to be seen through the 18th and 19th centuries and very much in the 20th century particularly after partition."

"Then if you take partition in 1922 as a starting point, you have the six counties of Northern Ireland. And within that, you have approximately 1 million Protestants and a half of a million Catholics. And some people talk about the double minority problem in Northern Ireland. Protestants are a minority in the island of Ireland as a whole, but Catholics are a minority in Northern Ireland. And minorities can develop certain kinds of paranoias. You might say that Protestants in the north of Ireland have had a paranoia for many years going back more than a century in relation to their security. You might also say that the Catholics in Northern Ireland,

since 1922, have had a paranoia about their security. Now when I refer to paranoia, I'm not suggesting that I don't think that there are bases for these fears on both sides. They are a reality, they are our perceptions."

15:55 Arthur: "Now I thought that I would talk a little bit about the voluntary and community sector." He then understands that the class was assigned to read an excerpt from his book, but to keep from embarrassing anyone he will try to refer to it as little as possible. "So I won't go into detail about it but I will offer myself up for questions of clarification or expansion."

17:25 Arthur: "What I thought I would do was to give you an overview of some aspects of the community and voluntary sector at the present time. What are some of the distinctive features of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland? I think one of the distinctive features is the breadth and depth of the sector. In the 1960's and 1970's, it was very local and there was a huge amount of voluntary action at a local and grassroots level. In particular in the Nationalist and Republican communities, those communities were characterized by a great deal of community action at the local level. There was a great sense of self-help and solidarity. And that solidarity was, to some degree, reinforced by an ever present awareness of the fact that there was an alien government, the Unionist government. This would be from 1922 to about 1970 when the government was suspended."

19:00 Arthur: "So we have a picture of strong social capital and a lot of voluntary activity at the grassroots level particularly in the area of helping and social welfare. People often distinguish between the community sector and the voluntary sector. The community sector is distinguished by the fact that it is largely area based. In other words, it's mainly associated with localities. Or sometimes, there are other forms of communities people draw attention to which are communities of interest. And we're think mainly of area based communities."

19:50 Arthur: "The sustainability has always been a problem for community based social action and voluntary action. You tend to find that lots of the same people have been around for a long time and if you had come here 25 years ago, I would be introducing you to some of the same people who you will be meeting during this trip. And it's both a strength and a weakness because both of those people have vast experience and expertise and networks of relationships. But sometimes one feels that they are perhaps occupying seats that they would be better to have left vacant so that other, younger leaders could come along and do other things. And there's going to be a succession crisis in 10 years time when some of the people who have been leading the communication sector are going to finally retire."

20:55 Arthur: "Just looking at the main lines of development of the community and voluntary sector. I mentioned just a moment ago that there has been a lot of emphasis on social need and the voluntary and community sector is very good on the social and caring side. And the voluntary and community sector is also, particularly on the Republican side, quite mature and sophisticated. Particularly in Belfast, there has been an interface between people who are active in various aspects of the Republican movement where people have had the opportunity of gaining leadership experience that is not normally the case with leaders in the voluntary and

community sector. And the value to confront government ministers and to argue articulately with a sense of confidence is something that has been a characteristic of some areas of the community and voluntary sector.”

22:15 Arthur: “Not so well developed, perhaps, in the areas of measurement of effectiveness or accountability. Very good at getting things done and getting preoccupied with getting things done. Good on the caring side, not so good on the evaluation of outputs and outcomes. And all of the things that preoccupy and fixate civil servants.” He mentions that not all of the government’s and the community sector’s arrangements are the right ones.”

23:15 Arthur: “From a policy point of view, I will say that we have just recently come out of a policy process that has taken about 18 months looking at the sustainability of the voluntary and community sector. This is a convenient moment to mention that we have had huge amounts of subventions from the European Union for about 15 years now. And during the past 10 years, we have had two peace programs. They are special support programs for peace and reconciliation which were introduced after the ceasefires in 1994. And those peace programs which are funded largely from Brussels, from the European Union, brought undreamed of resources for grassroots activity. And the community and voluntary sector are doing grassroots activity. So they were able to draw down huge sums of finance. And I think everyone will admit that the sector has become rather bloated over this past 10 years in particular. And there has been an enormous amount of job creation.”

24:25 Arthur: “That will all come to an end. It will be a fairly hard landing over the next two or three years. There will be a big shake-out. And I think we’ll see amalgamations and I think we’ll see quite a few organizations folding. The process by which this has been considered and developed is an interesting study. The government has set up a taskforce to consider the future of the voluntary sector and that taskforce has just responded. The government has also responded with funding commitments all tied to performance targets. The voluntary sector doesn’t like to be held accountable so they’re chafing under the performance targets. But that’s the only way the government can spend the taxpayer’s money according to some normalities of efficiency.”

25:20 Arthur: “The voluntary sector has also developed and matured very considerably over these 10-15 years because of the European Union money which it has received. All of that money has been associated with evaluation and assessment and monitoring and unbelievably rigorous demands of the various European anti-fraud agencies which monitor the spending of European money. The voluntary sector has had to climb a very steep learning curve in relation to evaluation and monitoring and accountability and auditing and all of those things that are so important to Europe. And one of the things that people often say about the volunteering sector is that they feel it’s being strangled. The European money, while very welcome, is driving out innovation and risk taking. And innovation is one of the features which we normally associate with the volunteering sector internationally. But it is sobering to think that the regulation that has going on may be making it rather anemic in terms of its ability to take risks and innovate.”

26:45 Arthur: "Probably the weakest area of the voluntary and community sector is with regard to the environment. We don't really have a vigorous and sustained voluntary sector with some clear exceptions. But speaking generally, we don't really have a strong environmental grassroots movement here in Northern Ireland."

27:15 Arthur: "So the strengths are the quality of the work that the sector does. Its willingness to grapple with issues, its breadth and its depth. One of the weaknesses I've referred to is the lack of new blood. And also the continuing reliance on the public sector. I can't recall the statistics for the proportion of the voluntary sector budget that comes from government, but it is a huge proportion of their income. Very little comes from companies, very little comes from donations from the public. And you have this paradoxical situation where on the one hand we have a governmental administration which is based on Westminster and led by Westminster ministers who are responsible for the government departments in Northern Ireland. So it's a very British administration. And you have a voluntary sector which is quite green and strongly represented on the Nationalist and Republican side."

"But over the 30 years there has grown up a sort of accommodation and mutuality between the leaders of the voluntary sector and community sector and government officials. The fact that we have ministers who come for a period of a couple of years who are responsible for these government departments, the lack of continuity with those government ministers means that those senior civil servants who run those departments and have run them for many years, they provide the continuity. Perhaps there's not the political accountability that you would normally expect in a democratic setting." He then states that he shouldn't talk about this subject for much longer because he doesn't want to bite the hand that feeds him.

29:10 Arthur: "And there has been this accommodation and politicians don't tend to get in the way because there is no assembly. So we have ministers from England who come in and come out, some only spend a week here or less. And we have senior civil servants who are in charge of huge departments with multi-million pound budgets. So they get to take a lot of decisions."

29:40 Carl Milofsky says that one of the things that was difficult in Northern Ireland is the fact that the Stormont assembly is disassembled. "It means that one of the things we expect to be true in the American context which is that community organizations are part of a process by which citizens organize themselves, make their interests known, and then make demands on politicians who then want to satisfy their constituents. There is sort of a problematic dynamic here partly because the politicians aren't there. So there aren't places to make those demands. But the other thing that we've talked about is that when the Stormont assembly does sit, there is a little bit of a tension between the politicians and the civil society. The civil society leaders have built up a leadership role separate from politics and so there's a problem there."

30:45 Arthur: "I think you often find in different countries that there is a problem and a tension between participative democracy and representative democracy." Arthur is then asked to explain those two concepts. "Representative democracy is basically you vote and I represent you. I'm mandated and legitimized in what I do because of the fact that I get more votes than the other guy. So that's representative democracy."

“Participative democracy is a term that has been developed. It’s a rather loose term to characterize people who are clearly acknowledge in communities as leaders but not by the voting system. We all know people of influence in the communities, hopefully benign influence. People who have a widespread respect within their communities, they would be considered to be civil society leaders. People who are responsible, members of the boards of community organizations, non-profits, and so on.”

31:50 Arthur: “And they have had an enormous influence on Northern Ireland because we haven’t had the representative level of democracy since 1972 when stormont was disassembled. And from 1972 until 1998, with some exceptions when there were failed attempts to reinstall a representative system at stormont, there really was no legislative assembly at stormont.”

32:30 Arthur: “We decided to do some research about the attitudes of soon-to-be members of the society to the voluntary sector. We interviewed people from the main political parties: the Ulster Unionist Party, SDLP, Sinn Fein, and the Democratic Unionist Party. We did this to find out what their attitudes were with the voluntary sector having a continuing role at public level, at discourse in Northern Ireland. Under the 1998 settlement, the Good Friday Agreement, and the legislation that brought that agreement into law, there was provision for something called the civic forum. And in the civic forum were 60 seats, the voluntary community sector was going to have 20 seats. Farmers were going to have two seats. So the relativities between the 20 seats for the voluntary and community sector and farmer and churches having two, three, or four seats was quite a striking thing.”

33:50 Arthur: “So we went to interview the future MLAs, the members of the legislative assembly at stormont, who had come by this new representative route, they had been voted in and so on. And we wanted to know what they thought of the voluntary and community sector having a continuing role.”

“They broadly typified the responses. On the one hand, Sinn Fein was saying that they thought it was great. ‘We have no experience in government, we are a grassroots party, we believe in listening very carefully to our constituents, and we think it’s great that the civic forum is there and it will be a deliberative and consultative assembly and we’ll be able to listen to the grassroots. And that will inform the development of our policies.’ That was Sinn Fein.

34:40 Arthur: “The SDLP, Social Democratic and Labor Party, were very ambivalent about the voluntary and community sector. They resemble, in some respects, old, industrial type labor from England with a green hue. And old labor was never very enthusiastic about voluntary activity. They have an approach that the state will develop the policies. So that was Sinn Fein and the SDLP, the two parties on the green side.”

35:20 Arthur: “And then on the Orange side, we talked to the Ulster Unionist Party and their response was: ‘Look, we have been here for 50 years, we ran this place, we know how to do it, if everybody else would just stand aside we will do what we’re good at doing which is administering and managing policy in Northern Ireland. It is time for the voluntary sector to stand

aside.”

“We talked to the Democratic Unionist Party and they were very vehement in their condemnation of the voluntary and community sector. They asked: ‘Who voted for them? Who do they think they are? We are here by the constituents who elected us and we have won our seats in a fair contest. The job of governing Northern Ireland is ours and we don’t need these self-important people who think that they represent constituencies which they don’t represent at all. They have no legitimacy.’ So there we see the sweep of opinion from green to orange and I think that’s quite interesting.”

36:40 Arthur: “So that’s just a little aside on the relationship between representative democracy and participative democracy. I remember going to the Northern Ireland council for voluntary action. That’s the umbrella body that represents the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. They convened a meeting just a short time before the stormont assembly was established. I’m sure they did many things in preparation, but I remember a meeting in a conference center in Belfast. They got together a number of people in a sort-of think tank capacity to think about how things will be different and to prepare for it. It was paradoxical because we all wanted the return of a legislative assembly. We all wanted more local democracy. We were all tired of English ministers coming in, assign some papers, and back to their constituencies (something called helicoptering). So we all wanted local people in Parliament running our affairs.”

37:50 Arthur: “When it was looming, and it was going to happen six weeks from now, people weren’t so sure. For the reasons that I’ve been talking about. Because they felt that things are going to be different. Somebody else will be arranging the furniture and we may lose our place in the sun. So they held this meeting to talk through and collect ideas in relation to what the new future would be like. And it was interesting going through that phase with them.”

38:30 Arthur takes a step back and gives the audience the opportunity for questions.

38:50 Someone from the audience explains that they are confused. “Your voluntary action sector, I’m confused about what you guys are and your role in the government and how if the government supports you, how are you separate from politicians?” She then asked how they have people in the government, and Arthur replies that they don’t have anyone in the government. The audience member says that things are much clearer now, but is still confused on where his group has seats.

39:30 Arthur: “As part of the settlement, it was decided to have an assembly called The Civic Forum. The Civic Forum wasn’t going to pass any laws, it would just consider questions and it could discuss and debate issues that were referred to the assembly. It would be a debating chamber that wouldn’t have any legislative power. And approximately 1/3 of its 60 members are going to be made up of the community and voluntary sector. And they try to get people from the extreme grassroots and it was sad to see that the Civic Forum became bogged-down in lack of communication and people insisting to speak in Ulster-Scot which nobody could understand. So it was a well intentioned idea that just didn’t work. But the Civic Forum was not a legislative

assembly but it was associated with the machinery of government. But it was only a think tank and a discussion chamber.”

40:55 Question: “Then why was there such animosity in general of the politicians?”

41:15 Arthur: “Well politicians are very aware of their legitimacy. If they won a landslide victory, then they believe that everyone is behind them, so they will do what they are mandated to do. And they don’t like people who have an independent voice because they can’t control those people and the very fact that they’re independent means that they are often critical and they have an agenda which is different from the political agenda which politicians have.”

41:50 Carl Milofsky: “They may also control a significant group of people in the community. So the politicians will want to do something and all of a sudden, there will be a lot of community resistance.” The student then acknowledges that her question is cleared up.

42:05 Question: “This might not be a perfect match with what you have been talking about, but yesterday I heard a news story about how the New York state public employees retirement investment is going to be 4 million pounds in Northern Ireland for their retirement. And I just thought that that was an amazing amount of money. But then I thought, how far does that go? The head of the investment commented that if you look at the Republic of Ireland and it is the most thriving economies in Europe and Northern Ireland is not. And he thinks it is all because of the Troubles and that there’s no reason why Northern Ireland can’t be thriving as much. How far do you see 4 million pounds going?”

43:00 Arthur: “Not very far, it’s a small amount of money. This whole thing about investment by US based pension funds has been a big theme in the past 20 years. And obviously inward investment is very important for economic development. And we had something called the McBride Principles which were adopted by the mid to early 1990’s and those principles applied to inward investment to Northern Ireland by US pension funds. And they drew attention to issues of inequality and discrimination and they really drove our equality legislation which is probably the most advanced equality legislation in the world. But to make an appointment to this university, there are layers of monitoring being done to make sure that the process is fair. We’ve had affirmative action policies and so on.”

44:15 Arthur: “But the McBride Principles were very important in precipitating changes in employment practices right across Northern Ireland in order to comply with the demands for US based pension funds. Many of which were articulating a very green message. I don’t mean any judgement, but it was part of the policy on the east coast of the United States. A strong Irish lobby. And there were many abuses here which thankfully got corrected.”

44:55 Question: “You were mentioning about how the DUP’s money is going to run out in the next few years. Do you feel that voluntary associations in Northern Ireland are preparing for that money loss and are looking towards other sources? In America there are private endowment and private funds.”

45:25 Arthur exclaims that Northern Ireland has seen very few private endowments. He then proceeds to the other question. "Well one of the things the government is doing in response to that is they're setting up an investment fund and a series of funds which are described in their new paper called Positive Steps. And that's the government's policy document on the way forward about the sustainability and development of the voluntary sector. But if you look at the figures in there, they are either very large or very small, depending on how you look at them. 25 million pounds is a significant amount of money. But when you're talking about a peace program which was more than 250 million pounds which is now finished, 25 million is really crumbs. And it'll be very interesting to see how the sector shakes down, a lot of people are going to lose their jobs." He then brings up a program that Brussels initiated where Peace 1 was between 1995 and 2000, Peace 2 was from 2000 to 2005, and now there will be a Peace 3 until 2008. But each time, the funds get smaller.

46:45 Question: "In our experience here, the murals on the Catholic side and the Protestant side seem to go about things in a very different way. Can you see that through the general policies of these communities?" Arthur asks if the audience member thinks that the Protestant murals are more violent. She notices that their strategy is much more defensive.

47:45 Arthur: "I think that probably typifies how they look at the world. They look at everything as if it's some game. If the other side wins a point, they lose a point. They think of things in terms of territory. If I could go back to the quotation about the colonization of Ulster, that was in terms of land. It's still very much in terms of land or territory and it's still very much in many of the towns in Northern Ireland. It's still in terms of who controls which streets and where the peace lines are. That is the overwhelming reality for ordinary people, particularly working class people, who live in those communities. Middle class people are much happier living in mixed communities. They don't feel they have anything to lose, they may feel they have something to gain from being in an integrated community. But working class people tend to be locked into their homes particularly in the older and decaying places of the cities. So territory is one of the key themes right back through the last 350 years."

"To come to the question of the murals, I think that that is true that the Protestant community in Derry look at Derry and look at their own history and their own future in terms of not going anywhere except losing ground. One of the things I've noticed is that looking at the murals is the typification on the Republican side in terms of Celtic mythology and images of a very different Ireland. I think that those have changed in the last few years from being much more militaristic. There may have been a policy to change and to present a new image of an Ireland that is connected with the past. They're plugging back into the Irish Celtic cultural thing which is very interesting. I note that in Derry, some of the Protestant and Loyalist community groups have not gone down the path of community and economic development. They've come down the path of culture."

51:05 Carl Milofsky: "What I thought about was the notion of Catholics and Protestants organizing themselves."

51:15 Arthur: "We were funded by the government to do a study on: Social, Capital, Collectivism, Individualism, and Community Background in Northern Ireland. We were looking at organizing in the two main communities. How do they organize themselves? How confident are they in approaching government and the funding agencies to draw down funding for economic development? How did they regard themselves in terms of the way they organize themselves and the way they relate to government?" He then mentions that he will leave a paper with statistics and interviews on some of these questions. "They show how the outlook and attitude of people living in communities on the two sides are really quite different indeed."

52:25 Arthur begins to read an interview from the paper. "For people of my age it goes way back to WWII in the free state (the Irish Republic). Derry men and women were dying for Britain in the service of the queen.' This is the Protestant working class community in Derry, they lost a lot of people who died in the war. 'My family and the younger people don't remember anything like that and are more open to change.' This lady was saying that we're like that because we have a view of ourselves as part of Britain loyal to the queen. Our young men died for Britain and for the United Kingdom and Derry was a big base both for the United States and for Britain patrolling the North Atlantic which was very important strategically during the 1939-1945 war. So here's a working class Protestant woman whose identity has been very much shaped by that."

53:35 Arthur reads from the paper again. "Protestant people are their own worst enemy when it comes to development because of the psyche that they have. Protestants take personal responsibility. With that comes individuality and the lack of community spirit. Protestants have had no crisis like the Famine.' The population of Ireland was 8 million in 1845 became 4 million in 1850. 2 million people left to go to America and 2 million people died over those 5 years. That was an enormously informative experience for the Irish Catholic people."

"So what he's saying there is that the Famine forged a green Irish Catholic identity. The northern areas where the Protestants were living were more prosperous and they survived and were not really impacted to the same degree of the Famine."

54:45 Arthur once again reads from the paper. "Anything that we did by way of the crisis, we quickly had to hide because we didn't want to show weakness.' What they're saying is that we are Protestant people living in a Protestant state from 1922. This was our country, our government. This person is saying that they had difficult times, but we kept quiet about that because we didn't want to criticize the government because it was our government. So we have a sense of solidarity with the state of Northern Ireland. A Protestant parliament for Protestant people. Whereas Catholics had a sense of antipathy or opposition to that because it was alien to them."

55:30 Arthur chooses to read from the paper once more: "Showing weakness would have meant that the northern Ireland state wasn't working. It would have been to say the state has failed and that would have given credence to our enemies.' So you can see the different attitudes of the two communities" He then explains that he could talk more about the paper.

56:10 An audience member begins to ask a question, but the video ended before she could

finish it.