Civil Rights Tape, Part I

Civil Rights Panel: Moderator, Eamonn Deane; Panel members: Ivan Cooper; Eamonn McCann; and Bernadette McAlisky. 3-5 pm, Friday May 30, 2003. (The schedule lists the location as The Junction on Bishop St., but actually the session was held in The Council Chambers, Magee College, Derry).

Two cameras were used to record this event so if sound or pictures are bad on this tape, one can switch to the other to see if the material is better. This camera gives close ups of each speaker. The other camera gives a picture of the whole panel. Since there are moments when panelists talk to each other, at those points in time it is probably better to use the other camera view rather than this close-up view.

When the tape begins only Ivan Cooper and the moderator Eamonn Deane are present. Dean makes comments about hoping the other panelists, Eamonn McCann and Bernadette McAlisky show up (which ultimately they do). The tape begins with a personal history from Cooper.

00:15 Deane begins, giving an overview of the panel purposes, which are to explore the history of the Civil Rights movement in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to the early 1970s. Deane introduces Ivan Cooper, saying he will not try to summarize his role except to say that he and the other two panelists were among the very significant players in the Civil Rights Movement and many events that occurred in Northern Ireland. Deane would like to explore what the Civil Rights Movement was, what it did, what relevance it had if any to the lives of each and every one of us today. We're mindful of the fact that we are talking about events that happened before you (the students) were born. So there's question what relevance these events have to your contemporaries who live here.

1:20 The major question for panelists is, if you had it to do over would you do it again the way it was done. What would you change, what have you learnedk, what lessons are there for us in this. The format is that each panelist will talk for 5-10 minutes about their thoughts related to the Civil Rights Movement and then we'll be open to questions.

2:05 Ivan Cooper begins. He has been told that Bucknell students are quite a sophisticated audience which he takes to mean that they've gotten quite a bit of background about the chronological order of events. I'm going to tell you in simple terms how I got involved in the Civil Rights Movement. I played a part with the other panelists who will join us in terms of developing the events of the CRM. They took a somewhat different course in their lives that followed. But nevertheless, at the time we were contemporaries in the Civil Rights Movement.

2:45 I was born and brought up outside the city (of Derry), approximately 8 miles outside the City in a rural area. I was brought up in an entirely Protestant area. I'm Church of Ireland, which as far as I know is equivalent in the United States of Episcopalian. I belong to a church that is an all-Ireland church and those of us who are part of it believe that it was founded by Saint Patrick in 432 AD....a number of Catholics don't quite agree (Eamonn Deane laughs). But in the global nature of things I'm described as a Protestant. I was born in a working class home.

I went to a college (in U.S. terms he means a junior high school and high school) where they played rugby. In those days, the people who went to the college were the sons of fairly well-off Protestants---businessnen and farmers. They took a great deal of interest in rugby. I simply hated it.

4:00 My sport was soccer. So I went to the Bogside when I was 12 years of age and I played soccer. I went to the home of family called McClennahan. They were very close friends of Eamonn McCann and not as close friends as Bernadette but nevertheless friends.

4:25 The difference between the home I was brought up in which was working class and the homes which I saw in the Bogside...the difference was so stark. Tuberculosis was rife in that community. The housing conditions were simply dreadful. 44% of the men were unemployed and a large proportion of the women were working in the shirt industry, which in those days was very heavy work. So I used to go along to Wellington St. in the heart of the Bogside, only a few yards from where Free Derry corner is today, into this very small house where wallpaper was pealing off the walls due to the damp conditions. Dermott McClennahan's father had tuberculosis. Three members of the family lived in poverty the like of which I had not experienced. But overwhelming everything else were these atrocious housing conditions and the high level of unemployment. An area that seemed always to be shrouded in the smell of the local gas company. This pungent smell stuck in your nose.

5:45 It was an entirely different background from the rural area where I was brought up with the lambs skipping in the fields. My father had a very large garden. There were just vegetables in that garden. So the starkness of the difference was extreme.

5:58 Over a course of time, I brought a lot of my Protestant friends to play football in the Bogside. That home, the McClennanan household, I'm very happy to say that I still retain the friendship of the McClennahans. They shared everything...this whole principle of sharing. And in those days, with the other men I met there, there was no hint of sectarianism. This is something that has developed more in recent years.

6:45 At that time, my interests and the interests of my compatriots came because of feelings of desperation about housing. As time went on, you have to realize that in Derry we had a Navy base that was an empty submarine base called HMS Sea Eagle. The navy personnel had housing reserved for themselves in the Waterside. At that time, approximately 33% of the people who lived on this side (the City Side) of the river were Protestant. The situation today is that only 8% of Protestants live here. But on the Waterside you had hundreds of houses reserved for Navy personnel so our first foray into civil rights direct action was to squat people into houses. We engaged in a campaign to squat people into these naval homes that had been lying for years in many instances without anybody occupying them. I must say that it was largely unsupported in the City. A handful of radicals, idealists, who never were going to get anywhere.

8:10 As time evolved we became acutely aware of the voting structure in the city. Two-thirds of the City elected eight members to the City Council. That population was Nationalist and Catholic and they elected eight members to the City Council. One-third of the population which

was Protestant elected twelve members to the City Council. By a process of gerrymandering there was permanent control of the City by the Unionist party. In addition to that, at that time, only people who were resident occupiers of houses could vote in local elections. In other words, if you had a house you and your wife had a vote in local government elections. If you had five children over the age of 21 (who lived with you), they didn't have a vote. Only the resident occupier and the resident occupier's wife had a vote. We also had in the City at the time limited company voting. That meant that if you set up a limited company you were entitled to six City government votes. So a large section of the population was disenfranchised. On the other side Protestantism and Unionism controlled businesses and through their control of limited businesses they had a large number of additional votes on the voting register.

9:40 Discrimination in employment was rife. My friends on the Bogside, many of them who were much brighter academically than I was, they would not have had the same opportunities in employment as I had because of my Protestant background. Discrimination was also rife in housing. But the most important thing from the perspective of this city was that the local corporations simply did not build any houses because houses translated into votes. Immediately outside the City we had a camp called Springtown Camp (http://www.springtowncamp.com). Springtown Camp was a camp built by the United States Army when the came here in the mid-war, in 1943 as far as I can remember and they left here late in 19 and 45. They left behind a number of (he gave them a name I did not know; we'd call them quonset huts) huts and as soon as they moved American personnel out in moved families. So we had 400 families living in Springtown Camp and I recollect that the mortality rate among children under the age of 10 was 38% in Springtown Camp. Dismal living conditions and terrible social stigma attached to people living there. Indeed it is very significant...I have a friend from the United States doing research into the families of those who died on Bloody Sunday and she has told me of the very large number of relations of those people came from Springtown Camp.

11:28 So here you had corporations insuring that houses were not built, gerrymandering the City, terrible housing conditions, denial of employment rights---44% of the men in the Bogside out of work---and the Special Powers Act. It had been used in the '30s, the '40s, the '50s, and the '60s. Whenever Unionist governments felt under any threat of any description they simply used internment without trial.

12:05 Those were the issues which led to the first civil rights march in the City. We had held a protest in the Guild Hall---the city hall---in August of 1968 in relation to the death of another child in Springtown Camp. We were flung out by the police when we attempted an occupation of the council chamber. And on the steps of the Guildhall that day, and I don't care who tells you otherwise amongst the historians, Eamonn Melauch proposed that we have a civil rights march in Derry on the 5 October 1968.

13:00 That march was banned by the minister of home affairs at the time, William Craig. (In the background, Bernadette McAlisky comes in the door, taps Cooper on the shoulder and says hello.) On the morning of the march itself, can I tell you that there wasn't a great deal of support for the idea and the concept of a civil rights march in Derry on the fifth of October 1968. But on

the morning of the march whenever we were broadcasting the holding of the march that afternoon, Eamonn McCann, Charlie Morrison, and I were arrested and we were held for approximately five hours. The police were under the impression that we were going to call the march off and when we were released at 20 past two, all three of us, we walked across the bridge and assembled at the Waterside Station. There were approximately 800 to 1000 people. A large number of those people were students in Belfast. Bernadette was one of those. She is, I have to confess, a little younger than me. A handful of people...800...1000 people...a lot of them from Belfast. Not many people from Derry because the feeling at that time was it was useless to protest because you couldn't win. And here, once again, the Minister of Home Affairs had banned the march.

14:50 So when we arrived at the Waterside station these people had assembled and the police read the Public Order Act out over the loudhealer (apparently a hand held loudspeaker) and I remember asking the chief constable---actually he wasn't the chief constable, he was superintendent...I'm afraid I'm forgetting his rank at the time...but after he read out the public order I remember asking him for the loan of the loudhealer and he gave it to me because he was under the impression that we were going to call off the march. Mark Smith (? can't be sure and name doesn't come up on Google) marched up to the police lines...there were three Labor M.P.s there that day, Russell Care, Ann Care, and John Ryan from the British Labor Party. They had been invited here by Gerry Fitt who was a Westminster MP...marched up to the lines and the rest is history. (An account based on interviews with participants is provided in Nonviolent conflict and civil resistance - Page 9, books.google.com/books?isbn=178190345X Sharon Erickson Nepstad, Lester R. Kurtz - 2012).

15:45 We were battoned. But the scenes were captured on film by a very fine cameraman called Gale Bryan of Radio/Televisharon (can't really hear the name...I think Irish television with a name in Irish...I can't find documentation of this on Google). In particular there was one incident where Majimsy (?) who was an inspector at the time of the police used a blackthorne stick on a young newspaper reporter called Martin Kiling, who is still a reporter for this city today. He had his notebook out and he was very severely gashed over the head and that was caught on film.

16:20 Within three days the press had arrived here. A new civil rights committee was formed on the 9 October in the City and a pledge was made that we would re-march that route that had been banned within six weeks. On 16 November 1968 instead of the 800 or 1000 people who assembled at the Waterside Station to take part in that march on the 5 October there were over 100,000 people. A flame had been lit that would take a long time to extinguish.

17:10 Within a relatively short time after the holding of that march, and after other marches in Northern Ireland that we all attended, a culture of marching had started. Those days people had relatively little money and every night in this city in all of the halls meetings were held attended by hundreds of people. The whole culture for organizing the civil rights movement was expounded by a range of speakers by people with a range of backgrounds. One of the most interesting things about the civil rights movement was that you had people who were wealthy

who marched in the marches and people who were poor marched in the marches as well. People were interested in the movement and it caught their imaginations.

18:40 Eamonn McCann enters and Cooper greets him.

19:00 Within a relatively short time legislation was introduced to sack the Derry Corporation and it was replaced by a commission. As soon as the commission was organized it created a crash program on housing. That legislation was introduced in relation to one man one vote which meant that people would have votes in local government elections. Legislation was introduced with respect to employment---discrimination in employment was outlawed, although opportunities for gaining employment were extremely limited. The Unionist government was under extreme pressure from Westminster because of the force of public opinion of the wider world.

20:00 1969 saw the election of Paddy O'Hanlon, John Hume, and myself to Stormont and a short time later Benadette was elected to Westminster. Civil rights MPs had taken their place in the various parliaments in order to take the civil rights demands into the forum of parliament. So most of the civil rights demands were legislated for within a relatively short time of the civil rights marches that had happened in various parts of the North.

20:55 One particular issue remained outstanding which really stuck in the craw of people in Northern Ireland and that was the Special Powers Act. And in 1971 the Special Powers Act was used once again. Brian Faulkner introduced internment without trial. If my memory serves me right in the region of just under 3000 people were interned. (He consults Eamonn McCann who agrees on the number.) It was debated as to the value of holding civil rights marches once again.

22:00 And some of you are aware that in 1972 on the third Saturday in January the civil rights march organized by the North Derry Civil Rights Association to the Gilligan Camp which is where a number of internees were held. Many of those internees were old time Republicans. Many of them were people who simply had an interest in Irish culture. Many of them were people who hadn't been active. Although they may have been involved in the civil rights movement they hadn't had anything to do with Republicanism.

22:48 The march was held on the third Saturday in January and that was the first time we caught sight of the crimson berets of the British paratroupers. They gave us a bit of a thrashing on the beach of McGilligan and in retrospect I think it was stupid. We had marched down on to that beach which brought us out into the open and created the opportunity for them to use violence against us. And the following Sunday was set as the day for the march that has come to be known as Bloody Sunday.

23:30 In the period between the Saturday of the civil rights march at McGilligan to protest against the internees being held at McGilligan Camp and the holding of the march on the last Sunday in January, a great deal of pressure was brought by various people about the merits of

holding that march. Originally with the march it was intended that there would be feeder parades to that march. There has been a great deal written about Bloody Sunday and I'm sure many of you are aware of the circumstances and of the tragedy. I believe that that day was a very significant day in terms of modern Irish history.

24:17 First of all, it divided Catholic and Protestant in a very damaging way. The Protestant population was (can't tell...fereted out?) by Unionism related to the civil rights movement over the period of a few years. We were castigated as Republicans and communists. So when Bloody Sunday happened a very large number of people in the Protestant community believed that the people who died that day were carrying weapons and firing them or carrying bombs and throwing them. So the damage in the relationships between Catholics and Protestants was very damaging and resulted in the Protestant population leaving the city.

25:20 Secondly, it did enormous damage in the relationships between Dublin and London. And thirdly, most important of all, before Bloody Sunday the IRA had very little support in this city. They had very few members and they had very little weaponry. That situation entirely changed. It was a catastrophic day in terms of Irish history that has affected every single person in this community, whether from the aspect of their families or their involvement in various things and the deaths that have occurred...the very large number of deaths. Or on the other hand the effect it has had on the economic well being of this community the effects of which you still see today.

26:20 So my involvement in the civil rights movement started as I told you earlier with going to that little house on Wellington Street. The evolution of the civil rights movement, I believe, owes a great deal to that house and that's where a great deal of it emanated from. The start of the movement in Derry was heavily weighted by those involved in housing protests. I'm going to leave it now for Bernadette and Eamonn.

27:00 Deane gives a short explanation to Bernadette about what we're doing in terms of giving a short account of the civil rights campaign and getting questions and giving answers.
27:35 Bernadette begins and apologizes for being late gives various comments including encouragement of the students to go to Sandini's for beer and political discussion.

29:10 My name is Bernadette McAlisky. Some people call me Bernadette Devlin and most people call me by my first name, which I'm never quite sure is a gesture of affection or disrespect. I've been called that for 35 years. Lord Scarman probably summed it up most effectively in his report saying fortunately, or unfortunately, I appeared to be present where all of the damage was being done. I don't know if he said that because he had some inkling that I was responsible. I was present when most of the action took place.

30:00 How I got into this movement, a lot of young people of my generation got into it and its very hard to know what led to what. Factors that led to my being involved started before I was born. I don't think people are completely responsible for situations they become involved in separate from their class and their race and their historical situation. I'm not from this City. One

of the peculiarities of my life is that I tend to be ascribed places. People think I'm from Derry. I'm not. I'm from County Tyrone.

31:05 I grew up in County Tyrone in not even a small town by American standards. When I grew up there it was town of less than 2500 people. Currently I live in a community of less than 250 people. So I'm not that fond of cities and I retreat from them. I grew up in a rural area. We were not dirt poor, my father was a skilled worker. My mother came from a small, petit bourgeoisie background---they owned a pub on the main street. My father died when I was young and THEN we were poor. Then we were, there were six of us, what was known at the time as "smart ass poor". The system that had been introduced within the United Kingdom in terms of education after the war, the advent of the Labour Party, and the introduction of the welfare state. The education system meant there was a meritocracy, I suppose, where smart ass poor could go to school. Unionists actually objected rather strenuously in 1947 to the introduction of free education, and they were probably very wise to do so because if there's anything more dangerous than poor people, it's educated poor people. Some of them go drifting off to be wealthy. But other people raise their aspirations, do not change their class view but acquire opportunities that they would not otherwise have had.

33:00 And so most of my sisters---I had five sisters---had an opportunity to go on and get a level of education that we would not have been able to get somewhere else. It's important to say that because the community I came from never forgave me for not being grateful for the education I received. So I was guilty on two counts. One I was poor and educated and two I was ungrateful for the education I received. By the time I got to university I was also virtually a free agent. When I was in my third year of university my mother had died. So I was utterly let loose on the world. Other students would say, "Oh, my allowance would be cut off!" I did what I liked. I only figured this out later in life, but I actually had no external brakes applied from the time I was eighteen until much later when I decided I'd better acquire some control for myself. And that's maybe how I got involved in volunteering for activities that anybody in their sound mind would not have volunteered for. Like signing my name for demonstrations that no one else would sign for in case it would go against their scholarship or their parents would not let them out to play or whatever.

34:40 And as a consequence of that after a period of time I found myself out of the the university on my neck, an honor I believe I share with Mr. McCann! A very short time I was out of the university on my neck I ended up in Parliament. So as a free agent in the world at the age of about nineteen, I was out of college at 20, and I was a member parliament at 21, and I was in jail at 22, and I was a mother at 23.

35:20 In the midst of all of that I must have attended hundreds of marches, met thousands of people, said a million words, went to America, got the Keys of New York City, (something I can't hear), went to Chicago and refused to meet Mayor Daley, on the grounds that we called Chief Inspector McGinsey that Ivan told about, Mayor Daley, because of the boldness of both of them for beating up democrats on the streets, went to San Francisco and met Angela Davis in prison, and then the Irish-American community asked the civil rights movement to take me

home...PLEASE! Truly, I acquired a political education. I acquired it on the streets. I acquired it from the people I met and debated at the same central meetings that Ivan mentioned. I met with and worked with and argued with, and we organized marches and we organized meetings and we organized sit ins. My natural gravitation came from my class and from my father who was a trade unionist and very quickly I defined myself in terms of socialism and Republicanism. Nothing over the past 30 years has changed that self definition, maybe clarified it.

37:10 So there I was, and I didn't have the slightest idea how I'd gotten into all this. But once I realized I WAS in it, there was a point just before I was in prison or when I was in prison, that I made a conscious decision that that's where I'm staying. And staying with it took me into war and it took me out of war. It meant that a great many people I grew up with I saw killed and a great many people I grew up with killed other people. We fought a war for 30 years. People went to jail and people got buried. But politics of the country have changed I think now. I think people had better politics in 1969 and there was a larger number of critical people with clear ideological politics about what they wanted. In the course of the war people were forced to react to positions imposed on them by government actions and by repression of legitimate demands.

38:35 Demands for equal citizenship and civil rights became demands for independence. Demands for independence became demands for a particular kind of society. And in some point in all of it we came to realize that most of the people caught up in the situation did not realize how they had gotten caught up in it or what they wanted out of it. And so at the end of the day they settle for very little The moral of the story is, think twice before you cross the road.

39:22 Eamonn McCann begins and says he'll start where Bernadette left off. (He speaks quickly and has an accent that is more difficult for me so I'll approximate some of the words he uses.) It's very attractive when you reach the age we are up here as opposed to the age you are down there, 30 years ago seems like a charmed time. Bernadette said and it seems to me too that people were better then. They were less corrupted, more idealistic, and more full of hope. Quite obviously one part of that is that one ages and one becomes cynical about things whereas back then maybe we weren't. Aging is inherently cynical. (There's a bit of joking back and forth. McCann says Bernadette did not mentioned that she'd met Muhammad Ali and watched him fight Joe Frazier...that was quite something.) He talks about how she was invited to meet with an Irish society of people from some county and talks about how silly it seems to him to be living in a city as exciting as New York and to be living in your head still in some small county in Ireland.

40:45 The night she was supposed to see the Irish county society Jimmy Breslan, who was a friend of ours, said why are you going to that meeting when the fight is on in the Garden, so we went there and we got all of these complaints from Irish Americans who were calling transatlantic and telling people here to come and get them because they're going to a bloody fight---and it was expensive to call transatlantic in those days. So there was a meeting in that little house on Wellington Street of the civil rights association and they said people from the Combined Counties Association in New York had called telling us to control Bernadette who

wanted to go to this fight rather than their meeting. So they asked, “what do you think we should do?” What???? No contest. Go see Ali. Well she did, and this was not quite understood in Irish American circles. But there just was a difference in perception of what was important. As far as we were concerned, going to the fight was not a dereliction of duty considering what we were doing in 1968-1969.

42:00 We did not see ourselves as something that had been generated from deep within Irish history. We saw ourselves as part of a huge wave that was contemporary and that was going all around the world that was part of something huge that was happening in the United States and in Europe and in Australia. It was part of the Prague Spring in Czechoslavakia, the May days in France in 1968, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the anti-Vietnam War movement everywhere, the movement for the rights of indigenous people in Australia. These were all movements we were conscious of and we saw ourselves as part of that. We it was important to us to see Ali fight rather than to go to the Combined Counties Meeting and there was just a different perception of the same events and the same movement. When you come on that thirty years later and look back another element another element of distortion is entered into the story when you look back on the events of the civil rights movement, that is the prism of thirty years of events that have intervened and that can be quite a difficult thing to make sense of. As she said, we ended up with something and we settled it for very little.

43:18 One of the cunundra of the situation (he gives a long side comment about classical education) has to do with how you understand the kind of account we give you when you’ve been here for a couple of weeks and you’ve heard a lot about the Belfast Agreement from people who want to confer some religious significance on it---but it’s a secular text. If you look at it and look at the settlement it delivers which has been accepted by all the nationalist parties---Sinn Fein and the SDLP---and the major Unionist parties---the Ulster Unionists and various other parties---is that if you look at it, there’s nothing there that wasn’t available 30 years ago. Absolutely not. We had a power sharing government in 1973-74.

45:15 So the idea that power sharing between a Catholic Nationalists and Unionists in a Northern Ireland government as something that has been conceded in the last couple of years as the result of an armed struggle---NONSENSE! It existed and it was available before the commencement of an armed struggle and it was delivered in the first couple of years of the armed struggle, but it certainly was not an achievement OF the armed struggle. You might see it as part of a process of creating a united Ireland and you might see the armed struggle as a sort of down payment on creating a United Ireland but that also was available way back in 1973.

46:00 It was clearly available in 1973. We have something here called the 30 year rule which means that government papers are not made available until 30 years after they were created. This applies to internal memos and position papers and all of the internal government communications of all kinds. You can see now what people were thinking and what was possible in a way that we could not know at that time. It is clear that everything in the Belfast agreement was available then without a struggle. The question then is, what the hell was all that about? Why did we go through 25 years of shooting and bombing and all the rest of it?

46:45 This raises another conundrum, which is the ease with which the Belfast Agreement has been accepted. Imagine you had a revolutionary, nationalist movement all of these people from Sinn Fein and the IRA fighting a ferocious armed struggle and enduring tremendous pain. The were committed to the principle of Brits Out! and they were determined to keep at it until the last British soldier was taken out of Northern Ireland. And yet five years ago they were ready to call off the armed struggle. They actually did call it off before that but they made the political deal. Five years ago there was no United Ireland. Logically, there ought to have been or there ought to be now great anger about that. You would expect a revolt of the grass roots against this leadership that had settled for so little, yet that has not happened. Instead the leaders who created this thing are enormously popular instead of being unpopular for what should have been called a sell out.

47:55 There are a few people on the fringes who are not happy but the majority of people who participated in the armed struggle and were committed to a unified Ireland and to getting the Brits out are celebrating this Agreement. They are not saying, "We have to accept this with a heavy heart because we just cannot go on with this because of what it's doing to our neighbors and friends." They're not saying that. They're celebrating it and that calls for an explanation. Very few people I know have read any explanations for this in the pronouncements of our major parties. You won't read it in any of the academic texts. They don't cover this question at all or even acknowledge that there is a question that demands an explanation. How come they settled for something that was available before they started fighting? They don't give an explanation of why they had people pay the price of taking them through this thing.

48:45 It seems to me looking back on it---and I don't say this as someone who claims to have seen all of this theory down through the years---but instead it's only over the last four or five years since the process has started and I've noted how people have reacted to it that it was something I couldn't understand. I waited, looking around the street where I live---I live in the Bogside which is a strongly Republican area---talking to people that I knew, members of the IRA, and what I couldn't understand...why? why? Are they gullible? Do they have rational reverence for Jerry Adams and Martin McGinnis, that they'll follow them anywhere? Well that's not the neighbors that I know.

49:30 The conclusion I've come to is this. It's a tentative conclusion and it's not a conclusion that you can prove. The explanation is that the IRA's armed struggle, that has lasted for a quarter of a century and with all sides being involved resulted in 350 human beings being killed, hundreds of thousands of years being spent in jail, and torture and families destroyed and the rest of it, that the IRA's armed struggle was fought on a false basis. It was fought on a basis that was not what was actually presented to the people including their own people. I think the history eventually will require the armed struggle of the IRA to be seen not as a resurgence of Irish nationalism, of a militant nationalism and a desire to get the Brits out of Ireland.

50:20 History will record the IRA armed struggle as a continuation of the civil rights movement by other and inappropriate means. That's what it was. I think that the IRA's armed struggle---

it's a belief from me and not something that can be proved and it's not susceptible to that type of examination. It seems to me that what happened in Northern Ireland after Bloody Sunday is that an irrational and a vicious response, both of the Northern Irish authorities and then when the soldiers came onto the streets of the British authorities, to the civil rights movement engendered such anger at the way that they were being treated that the idea of fighting back with arms against them made emotional sense and to a certain extent made intellectual sense. If they are going to do this to us then we're going to fucking do it back to them. That's a straightforward thing. And the Irish Republican tradition has always been there just below the surface of the civil rights movement and constitutional nationalist politics in the 40s and 50s and early 60s and all the rest of it. That tradition suddenly came to seem appropriate, particularly among the younger people and the more urgent people for enterprising Catholic working class areas. After I had this idea I talked to nearly every ex-IRA person I could find and I still do asking what did you think? Did you know about Republican ideology and early Irish history? Were you really in there to get this Brits out? Did you BELIEVE this stuff? And overwhelmingly they said, "No I didn't."

51:55 I talked to somebody who was in the first IRA Congress for like 52 days that included quite a few of his neighbors and Bernadette's neighbors some time ago and he said, "Looking back on it, he says, most of the people I served time with in prison were not Republicans when they went into prison. They joined the IRA because they'd been going home some night when they'd been stopped by the RUC or the UDR, which was a part-time paramilitary force attached to the British army, where they'd been insulted or their family had been insulted their religion were being insulted they'd be slapped around a bit, maybe not damaged all that much but nonetheless it still would be humiliating and an angering thing that happened to you, or a search of the house where their mother was thrown down the stairs by a couple of cops. And he said, "Fuck it," and went out the next day and joined the IRA. And understandably so. After Bloody Sunday as Ivan told people literally formed queues to join the IRA. I saw it with my own eyes. They formed a queue to join the IRA because they were so angry at seeing soldiers coming in to murder our neighbors on our own streets.

53:05 But that impulse to do that has nothing to do with one's political ideology. It does not come from your political perspective. People attached the IRA ideology onto their political perspective afterwards. So it seems to me that that is an inappropriate political perspective.

53:20 If you read every standard account of the Good Friday agreement and the path to the Belfast Agreement, some of them award winning books by award winning journalists, every single one of them presents this process as one in which wise leaders and wise people intervened on the situation, managed by subtlety and guile, guided by idealism managed to lure a warlike people away from a path of violence and on to the path of peace.

53:51 NOT TRUE. NOT TRUE. In fact that way of looking at politics is an insult to the mass of people. What actually happened is that the political leaders, particularly political leaders of Irish Republicanism, sold this inappropriate ideology as the basis for a fight back. A fight for a United Ireland and we won't stop until we have a united Ireland. Over a period from the mid-1980s

looking back on it now, the leaders began to adjust to where the people were actually at. The peace process, far more than is acknowledged by any of the standard texts, the peace process was generated from below. It was not imposed by leaders from above. And I think this is true generally of political processes around the world when you look closely at them. But from the point of view of a journalist or an academic or an historian, it's far easier to read it from the standpoint of leadership because leaders leave speeches behind, you've got the minutes of the meetings they attended, you can see how their thoughts changed from moment to moment. Then you can tell the whole thing in terms of leadership. In fact, the mass of people are generally left out of history and they are hidden from history---all history. From the history of your country as well as the history of this country as well.

55:10 If you're looking to understand what happened in the North of Ireland over these last 20 or 25 years, and the role and what was definite about the civil rights movement in the 1960s, keep in mind that the people you ask about it are people whose names never appeared in newspapers, ordinary people. Bernadette's quite right. Go down to Sandini's bar and listen to old codgers like me! (joking between panelists) If you talk to ordinary people in the streets, what you realize really happened in this country over the last 25 or 30 years was far more interesting, far richer in possibility, and far more about masses of people that it is about a standard and rather trite story about idealistic politicians like Jerry Adams and the rest of them leading these gullible people prone to violence away from evil and into the constitutional arena.

56:10 McCann ends. Tape ends with Eamonn Deane asking the audience for questions. These become the subject of the next tape.