

Community Relations Panel tape 2

(This is a continuation of Community Relations Panel tape 1. This video starts off with Brian answering the same question that other panelists have been discussing. The question from the student in the previous video was, "Seeing that dishonourment of the IRA is vital to the sense of trust of the peace agreements, how can the government expect a community that feels it can't trust its own police force and sees a military presence as obtrusive give up the only real sense of protection that they have?" There seems to be a gap in each of these videos from the time that was taken in switching in the new tape.)

00:00 Brian: "Obviously there were problems with the military use and recognizing that but I think there's a point that's continually missed. A main reason why young Nationalists weren't joining the military was because of fear of threat of being murdered from the IRA. Current figures indicate and show that the number of new recruits and applications have increased significantly from the Nationalists population."

00:55 Brian: "I think we also have to recognize the huge sacrifice and compromise the people (he says who specifically have compromised, be he is too hard to hear) put forward. And I can't remember the number of officers who lost their lives for this. We'll also point out that it's a huge issue as well about the issue of personal identity." He mentions that it was a bug issue looking at the changes of the current police force. Some were in favor of it and some looked at the changes as an insult to their culture. Brian went back and talked about the attempt for recruitment to include more Catholics in the force. He then gives an example of a kid who wanted to be a police officer and applied to the PSNI. The boy went through the recruitment process, did well and passed the process, but was denied due to his religion. The kid reapplied twice more and was rejected both of those times because he was a Protestant.

4:20 Eamonn: "Sometimes I find myself resisting to say that one group is definitely wrong. And I really try to get myself to listen to the other side. In terms of the majority perception within the Catholic, Nationalist community, there is a belief that almost as soon as the Good Friday Agreement was signed, Unionists politicians decided that they made a mistake. And so they shortly went back to the way things were. Whether or not that's true, I find that extremely frustrating."

5:40 Eamonn: "As for the IRA decommissioning, that seemed to be an assisted invention. So that's indicative of the level of mistrust between the two communities. Despite the fact that an agreement was signed by all sides, almost immediately one side doesn't really believe that the other has signed it."

6:25 Question: "I realize there was a demand recently for the IRA to hand over arms, but not for the Loyalist paramilitary forces to hand over their arms. When do you see that all sides will hand over their arms if ever at all?"

6:45 Arthur: "I really have no idea, I have no information on how these organizations operate."

But I don't see much readiness on either side despite the commitments that were given by the associated political parties in 1998. And I can understand the reservations of both sides, everyone feels they need to arm themselves should the need arise."

7:35 Brian: "Can you trust the other side? I think someone wisely said years ago that it only takes one gun to keep the conflict going. But there's a strong sense that we're here to protect those communities from the IRA and if the IRA disbanded, there would be no need for us. And it's almost the same mentality on the other side."

8:40 Damien: "The point that I was trying to make was that there is hurt on both sides. And each community has its specific view on who the protagonists in the conflict are. But we need to move beyond that. I do hope that someday we'll be able to work out the issues of common concern. But we need to do that collectively. This is our shared future." Damien then becomes very difficult to hear. Eamonn asks for three questions to be asked.

10:55 Question: "How do you plan to implement the document's main goal of creating or sharing with a pluralist society? For example, can desegregation be implemented without the consent of everyone? Will you attempt to educate people on how you plan to achieve this goal and its greater purpose?"

11:20 Question: "With the institution of an accepted policing service, what plans are there to deal with paramilitaries? Where will they go? What is going to be done to stop them from engaging in acts of violence?"

11:35 Question: "What's your interpretation of the Good Friday Agreement and has it been affected thus far? And do you see the Good Friday Agreement as a catalyst for other agreements to speed up this process?"

12:10 David: "Well I think everyone aspires for some sort of shared future. Reality is that we have shared these problems for the last 600 years. This is a matter of our own immediate needs, community needs, family needs, and church needs. That has caused spatial segregation." He then briefly talks about different instances of conflict in the past millennium between both sides. David emphasizes that both sides do not like each other.

"Even if unification was to come tomorrow, there would still be a Unionist minority in the south which is very uncomfortable with the government institutions. The reality is that the shared future means, and for the Unionists it meant, that the Belfast Agreement was the final act of settlement between Unionism and Nationalism. For the Republican community, it was a stepping stone towards unification. It was they who refused to work with institutions unless everything was moving towards their goal. And it is our path as citizens to move the communities through that process of change, and to do it in a non-violent manner." He then asks for the second question to be repeated.

14:35 Question: "With the institution of an accepted policing service, what plans are there to deal with paramilitaries? Where will they go? What is going to be done to stop them from

engaging in acts of violence?”

14:50 David: “Therein lies the problem that the Republican community has with policing. The British police service is upholding the British laws in Northern Ireland, which goes against what Republicans think. So to give allegiance to the British police service is to betray the very core of of the provisional IRA for the past 30 years.” He mentions that for whatever the police do, the paramilitary group has to have a response. And this response would be reminiscent of what occurred 30 years ago, which would bring conflict. “But this is an internal security matter which has to be resolved by our own people.”

16:40 Brian: “I actually believe that Sinn Fein would sign on with a policing agreement right now if they agreed with it. If it hadn’t been for these things (Brian lists a few people or events involved with the peace process), then Sinn Fein would be on board with such an agreement.” He mentions that there is an oversight commissioner who oversees different policies and relations and that there is a policing board that is eclectic with different political views. There is a department of a kind of internal affairs which is above a board that manages the money of the group. Under that you would find local committees and bodies that deal with different needs. On top of this, there are a few volunteers that help out when they can. “So I can’t really see what else that can be put in place to ensure inclusiveness. And if Sinn Fein cannot get involved with policing in any way of the process, then there’s no way that they can get involved.”

19:55 Damien begins with saying that he disagrees with what David said before. He then brings up what Eamonn had said before about the constitutional issue and that it had been dealt with. “The fact of the matter is that the Good Friday Agreement did not agree definitively with the constitutional issue. You still have competing Nationalist aspirations here in the north. One of the major problems that we have here in terms of discussing the nature of division in our society is that the common denominator is the sectarian conflict. And there’s a lot more to the conflict than purely sectarian division. There’s also the conflict between the competing forms of Nationalist beliefs. So Northern Ireland continues to be a contested territorial space even after the Good Friday Agreement has been signed. And the principle of consent was supposed to ameliorate that to try and give it a peaceful expression.”

“So within the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, Sinn Fein and other groups with the same goals would try and galvanize their energies towards a united Ireland. So it’s perfectly legitimate within the terms of the Good Friday Agreement to pursue that. It’s also perfectly legitimate for Unionists to try and maintain a union based on the principle of consent. So there is a balance that has been struck there. But what I’m essentially saying is that the constitutional issue is still active. And that does impact on people’s sense of security.”

23:05 Damien: “In terms of getting through the implementation of the Shared Future document on the issue of desegregation, I think it is something that will take a long time to do, it’s difficult. But I think we have to concentrate on the good parts about this document and that this represents something that we can build upon. In terms of the fundamental principles, it talks about the importance of leadership among other things. It talks about the need for long term cross-government coordinated action. And it talks about the importance for local action. So it

outlines good, fundamental principles to create a shared future.”

25:20 Arthur: “There is one thing that I can point to on public policy in the last five years which have been pretty gloomy until now. I was interested in the district partnerships that were established in 1996 to distribute European funding here. The district partnerships existed in every local authority area. 1/3 were politicians whose beliefs balanced, 1/3 were representatives of the community, and 1/3 from business and trade unions. These partnerships were given allocations of money by the European Union. But they had to work up plans with the local area they represented to distribute this money and to receive applications from community groups, voluntary organizations, and other agencies within their areas. So there was a flurry of activity from these partnerships for two years which happened all across Northern Ireland.”

27:30 Arthur: “In our research on district partnerships, it was very striking that once you took the constitutional question out of the equation, district partnerships weren’t concerned with the future of Northern Ireland. They were concerned with social and economic development in their local area. People found there the extreme poles of political people coming together and able to sit down and discuss the needs of small farmers and the needs of mothers with small children.” Arthur was taken aback, he had never seen cooperation like that at the local level.

28:40 Arthur: “We have to think about the question of education and I don’t think anyone knows how to move forward on that. Authority on both sides have a strongly vested interest in a segregated education system. And that is something I don’t notice coming up very prominently in this document. I don’t think that any government is strong enough to take that on, but it is an absolute imperative.”

29:30 Arthur: “Another point leads to segregated housing, which I believe is happening all the time across Northern Ireland as the housing market dictates people’s choices. In the privately owned housing sector, there is a considerable amount of desegregation going on.” Arthur is upset by this separation, which reminds him of a debate he had a number of years ago. There was a debate on segregation in housing, and everyone was against it. He brings up someone that had an interesting point towards a solution to the problem. “He suggested that in order to encourage members of the two communities to come together, the government should institute a system of differential rents. So if you were prepared to move to a very integrated housing area, there will be a rent subsidy which would give you a lower rent for that area. And the rents in the surrounding areas would be higher by a substantial amount.” Arthur says that he isn’t for it, but he has thought about it. And there aren’t any proposals about housing in the Shared Future document.

32:10 Brian: “Arthur’s idea is quite interesting, but in reality where most of the segregation problems exist is in working class areas where housing is at a low cost already. But I agree that there is progress being made in terms of integration. The levels of economic prosperity in the north are greater than they’ve been in the past 30 years. And this city has been an example of that.”

“What has happened in the short term has been that young people have been provided

with reasonable jobs. And these young people are then buying homes. Once you give a young person employment and responsibility, they naturally move away from sectarianism.”

33:45 Eamonn begins to speak and suggests that everyone takes a 10 minute break. The break is cut out from the tape so the video picks up during an audience member’s question.

33:55 Question: “...The Orange Order, the Apprentice Order, and the Black Order are all male groups. What does this mean for the gender roles in equality in the Protestant and Unionist community? Also, what does the fact mean that women make up over 50% of the population in Northern Ireland but are scarcely represented in the political arena? What does this mean in terms of your goal of equality?”

34:30 Question: “My question is based question is based on Section 4.10 in the Shared Future document where there is a clause that states that ‘there is a continuing need to build on the capacity of both communities to enable them to identify and express their needs to build partnerships between and within communities, and to engage in the ownership, development, and implementation of programs to meet their needs.’ In my personal experience here in Northern Ireland, I have found that organizations that are focused on localism to build the foundations of a strong civil society are quite apparent. Yet they themselves are not oriented in long term, sustainable development of their organization. Do you foresee any intentions of training the organizations to sustain themselves to enable them to achieve long term, sustainable development within the communities? In other words, can we train them to deal with their own placements in the organizations once the money is gone?”

35:30 Question: “Clearly obtaining peace is the top priority for the government and thus a large portion of federal funding would go to these organizations, but can the government continue to fund these organizations without sacrificing money that would otherwise be going to cultural and arts organizations? And how can the government find a balance between funding the organizations that work for peace and institutions that are important for society such as arts institutions?”

36:10 Arthur begins by saying that it will be difficult to answer the question of female rights because the entire panel is male, which he makes a joke about. So he doesn’t feel qualified to answer that question. “As far as the capacity and sustainability is concerned, I’m interested in the observation about the need for management training. I think the voluntary and the community sector have a huge job to do to scale itself up in this area. I also that the government has established a task force on sustainability which is looking at funding issues and issues of sustainability. That is a very high level governmental body which will be reporting next year. They are very concerned about the imminent end of European funding for community centers. I don’t think it’s any secret that there’s going to be a lot of organizations that will experience going out of business, mergers, and other things. There will be a whole reconfiguring of the boundary sector in the latter part of this decade just as there was a lot of growth in the latter part of the last decade.”

38:10 David: "I'll try and tackle the women's gender issue. It's obviously clear that there's a distinct lack of women in any management structure. The Women's Coalition was set up to push women's gender issues in government and elsewhere." He mentions that a number of courses were put in place locally so Protestant women joined the courses. When these women mixed with men from the other community, they were able to argue for their case. And because many Protestant women could not discuss serious policy issues, they became embarrassed and dropped out of the course. But a number of them had continued on. "It's a sad reflection of society where the priority, in terms of political solution, are the priorities that our community is focusing on. They say that the conflict of the last 30 years is something the focus must be given to and they don't want the gender issue at this stage." He says that this happens because the issues need to be prioritized in order for any to get resolved.

40:40 David: "We haven't focused on sustainability in the Unionist community quite to the extent that we see it within the Nationalist community. Having said that, the common approach for training would be organizations with local, strategic partnerships who are looking at the long term stability of the community sector. But the government has no commitment to the community voluntary sector in the long term. There's over 5 thousand people in Northern Ireland employed in that sector." And in the long term, single issues groups may disappear at the local level. But he says that community development will have to continue in the long term.

42:45 David: "Someone will say that if we divert that money, the arts and sciences will lose that money. But in reality, the arts are partial to the peace process. They're the living embodiment of how our community has progressed."

43:35 Damien: "I think it's an indictment of our society that women do represent a socially excluded population. And it's not just here in the north, but also globally as well. In terms of the political space, we're mostly populated by men. Some political parties are better than others in terms of female representation but by and large, I think that is a serious issue that has to be addressed in the future. I also believe that participation is more substantial now. But women are marginalized in those sectors." He mentions that the community partnerships in west Belfast are all headed by women. There women fight in public campaigns and take a larger role than most women do. "So I think it is a serious issue that has to be addressed."

47:05 Damien: "In terms of sustainability, I think that there is a staggered process in terms of community development between the two communities and people are at different stages in terms of community development. And it's a learning curve for communities. The most important thing that I believe will help community development is the issue of long term sustainable funding. Beyond the money that is there, social inclusion and addressing the issue of poverty in working class communities in the north is an issue that's been earmarked here in point 4.10. But there is little substance to what they've actually been saying, it just makes a general statement. I think that this is the government's responsibility. They need to ensure that community development initiatives on the ground are well funded. It's considered a vital part of the structure in our society."

48:50 Damien: "In terms of cultural based organizations in terms of peaceful development organizations like mine, I think the peace process requires a collective effort. And I think that every organization, including the cultural and arts organizations, have a vital role." He elaborates further that since it is a collective effort, you cannot choose which organizations get more funding over another.

49:50 Brian: "In my experience, the Protestant community center has been made up of a vast majority of women. I think there's a theory within the Protestant community that women can engage in politics but it is seen as something that men do. And within the Protestant community, the range of choices in politics is limited."

51:15 Brian then talks about sustainability. He discusses the range of programs that his community has put in place. "But I still firmly believe that we'll only be a maximum of 50% sustainable. And as Damien said, there has to be a realization from the government that they have to adequately fund the community sector." He then talks about how much work workers in the community sector will do. A section of what he is talking about is missed though because his thick accent is difficult to pick up. But he believes that a lot of structure from the community structure was lost in north Belfast because of cutbacks of funding. Also a lot of experienced and trusted workers have left. The arts sector would benefit quite a lot from the fund because of the ideas that would have arisen."

53:45 Eamonn: "We're offered an opportunity now to make a claim to stay that the community relations programs should stay in existence. And not only should it continue in existence, but it should become more and more sustainable. And I think in any responses to this document, this one needs to be made over and over again. Central government now has the opportunity to establish a body which is independent of government but which is self-sustainable."

54:45 Question: "I know you talked a little bit about the effects of education, but I'm interested in the (some system, but the audience member is challenging to hear) system especially given the fact that such a small percentage of children in Northern Ireland attend integrated schools. So my question is what do you think, if anything, the leadership of Northern Ireland, the government, can do to support or give incentives to promote the educated school system?"

55:15 Question: "It has been suggested that people on all sides of the conflict see themselves as victims. And as victims, they cannot accept responsibility for their hurtful actions during the Troubles and beyond. Is there any planned course of action to help people overcome this sense of victimization?"

55:40 Question: "I spent some time in a region where there is an 80% unemployment rate and in another region which has a 65% unemployment rate. We've touched a little bit on the unemployment problem and this document mentions the problem, but it doesn't come up with any solutions. What I noticed was that the women in these communities struggle to feed their children and to find resources for themselves and their children. Is there something that can address the unemployment rate?"

56:30 The tape seems to have briefly cut and it resumes when Arthur is finishing to answer the presented questions. Eamonn then gives the floor to David.

56:50 David: "A suggestion for an updated education system needs to be put in place." He then begins to tell a story from a few years ago when he was in Dublin for a forum. There he met a Catholic priest whom he had agreed with that children must be brought together at the earliest possible age. They agreed that there shouldn't be segregation nor division in schools. "Education should apply to all students throughout the entire education system. It must be standard policy and standard practice." He acknowledges a statistic that came up earlier about a university that had 90% of one religion. David blames this fact on the developing plan in that the community fell behind. But he explains that there is now funding for the schools and for the communities to increasingly desegregate the schooling.

59:55 David: "As for victimhood, I think we all have a sense of victimhood. No community has a monopoly on the tears that have been shed during the past 30 years of this conflict. Some people tell us that we should forget about the past. But I think we must recognize the right of people to remember the past and the hurt told to them either through community celebrations or through whatever. Whether if you're a Loyalist or a Republican, you have the right to remember." He then discusses the different ways the two communities express their history and their beliefs."

1:01:40 David: "Poverty is the underlying issue. Unemployed class communities have suffered the most and the most deprived areas are the areas where you see the interface troubles existing." He mentions that the government is doing a better job, but that they are still ignored areas of poverty.

The tape then ends.