

Tom Fraser 2003 2/2

(This seems to be a continuation of the tape Tom Fraser Intro to the Issues 1/3. That video left off when Tom was answering questions from the audience which is where we find him at the beginning of this tape.)

00:00 Question: "Do the percentage of votes Northern Ireland gets consistent, or do they differ every election?"

00:10 Tom: "Northern Ireland has two levels of government. One of them is operating and one of them is in suspension at the moment. Northern Ireland still returns 18 members of parliament to the overall parliament in London, and that's simply divided up among geographical places according to population."

1:00 Question: "So it's the same number of people but it will differ the number of members of Sinn Fein that are in parliament?"

1:05 Tom: "Yes, it's simply divided up. There's a body known as the electoral commission which covers the whole of the United Kingdom. It's politically neutral and it divides up according to population. It's like a congressional district in the US." The same person wants to confirm that it is whoever gets elected that year, and Tom says yes.

1:35 Seeing that there is no more questions, Tom appears to move on in his lecture. "Well what these members did was instead of going to London, they formed the assembly of Ireland. And they proclaimed their allegiance to the Republic. They then began a campaign against the crown. In January of 1919, they began to campaign against the police and formed their own army which they called the Irish Republican Army which they regarded as the legitimate army of the Irish Republic."

2:35 Tom: "Now what I'm trying to trace for you is what is for Republicans their sense of legitimacy from the confirmation of the Republic in 1916, to the elections in 1918, to the formation of their own parliament in 1919, to the formation of their own army in 1919. And by 1921, the IRA and the enforcers of the British crown have fought each other to a standstill. And the predominantly Nationalist 26 counties of Ireland have become independent not as a Republic, but as an Irish free state. So in 1922, the Irish free state consisted of 26 predominantly Nationalist counties of Ireland have become independent as the Irish free state. And later in 1949, it becomes a Republic."

3:40 Tom: "1916 is as important to Unionists as it is to Republicans because in 1914, thousands of young men from the Ulster Volunteer Force joined the British army. They became known as the 36 Ulster Division. The division of the British army recruited entirely from the Protestants and Unionists of this part of Ireland. On the first of July in 1916, the British army began its great defensive against the Germans in the Battle of the Somme. And due to the horrendous conditions of WWI, the slaughter was enormous. In the space of 36 hours, 5,500

men were killed. And since Ulster was a small community, the loss of these many boys was a devastating effect.”

5:05 After the Battle of the Somme and the loss of so many men, Protestants said that they deserve their reward. “The Battle of Somme is commemorated in the Unionist community just as much as it is in the Republican community.”

5:40 Question: “At that point, was the UVF strictly Unionist or was it Unionist and Nationalist?”

5:50 Tom: “It was strictly Unionist. Now the interesting thing about the Battle of the Somme was that large numbers of Nationalist Irishmen also joined the British Army. And one of the other British assault divisions in 1916 was the 16th Irish division. They lost horrendously too, but they were never remembered in the same sort of way. So the one that ‘matters’ is the Battle of the Somme.” He then says that his partner Neil Jarmin can show the group around the different murals in Belfast that display memorialize this.

6:55 Tom: “So 1916 is a critically important date for each of the political traditions. I would argue that it is the most important date in the 20th century. And what the Unionists get out of this is the partition of Ireland. The Irish free state comprised of 26 predominantly Catholic and Nationalist counties of Ireland, but the 6 counties plus the cities of Belfast and Derry were retained within the United Kingdom which is why we get the title of the country the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.”

7:45 Tom: “In 1921, essentially, the Unionists get what they want. They get their reward for their work in WWI and 6 counties are retained in the United Kingdom. But problems come in. The problem, first of all, was that 26 counties were almost exclusively Protestant and Unionist. 33% of the population was Catholic and Nationalist. The plain fact was that Nationalists in Derry (a predominantly Protestant city) felt every bit as Irish as somebody in another part of Ireland. And what was being denied to them was their essential sense of national identity. This took Nationalists in Northern Ireland a long time to recover. Nationalists felt cut-off from Irish independence. The population at 33% was both too big and too little. What I mean by that is that Northern Ireland was given its own Parliament and government. And one of the curiosities of 1921 was that Northern Ireland got home rule which it resisted for a number of years.”

10:00 Tom: “The problem with the parliament was relatively straightforward. As long as people voted according to identity, there was always going to be a Unionist majority since 2/3 of the population were Unionists. So from 1921 until that parliament was abolished in 1972, it was always a Protestant government. That’s why I say that the Catholic minority was too small, because 33% is not a majority.”

“But it was also too big. 33% cannot ultimately be ignored. You can ignore a small minority (he then gives an example where a 5% minority was ignored), but 33% is just too big. Ultimately, the frustrations of that minority are going to come to the surface. They were harmlessly ignored from the 1960’s, but during the 1960’s, the frustrations about minorities have come to the surface. So Northern Ireland comes into existence, it gives political self-

determination and expression to the Unionist community, and the Unionists get what they want. They are retained within the United Kingdom. It does not give the Nationalists what they want, they want to be part of the united Ireland, they feel themselves to be Irish, and they are excluded from parliament from 1921 to 1972.”

12:40 Question: “I just had a general question. Why didn’t a lot of the Catholics in Northern Ireland migrate to the Republic of Ireland?”

13:00 Tom: “Well some did. If you go back to 1921, you get some shift in population. It wasn’t very large, but some people did migrate. What is more interesting is that members of the Protestant minority came north. If you talk to Unionists, you will find that many had to move because they didn’t feel safe where they were. If you talk to Orange men and Unionists (in some town that is too hard to hear), then what you’ll find is that many of them are two generations descended from Protestant families who left the Irish free state.” So what will be found more often is the Protestant migration north of the border rather than Catholic migration southward into independent Ireland.

15:30 Tom: “I just want to move on to the final part to see how some of these things were reinforced over subsequent years. I think 3 things are important. The tension between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland might have let themselves out.” He then mentions the crash of wall street that took place which had everything to do with the world economic system. “It had desperate consequences throughout the industrial world, including here. The social consequences for cities like Derry and Belfast were those of economic devastation. Unemployment increased, and there was no system in the period from 1929 through the 1930’s of unemployment relief of any form. It meant that the two communities were fighting for jobs and it heightened the division between Catholics and Protestants. Catholics employed Catholics, Protestants employed Protestants, and there were more Protestant employers so Catholics had trouble finding jobs. Due to this, discrimination built up. So in 1929 wall street crashed absolutely devastated economies which then spilled over into relations between the two communities.”

17:30 Tom: “The second thing which was important was the outbreak of WWII in Europe. Dublin and Belfast took entirely different directions in 1939. The leader of the Irish free state (he gives the name, but it is too difficult to hear) declared Ireland to be neutral. And Ireland remained neutral from 1939 to 1945. But since Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland was part of the British war effort from the beginning. What that did was sharpen the differences between the two parts of Ireland. Belfast suffered two devastating air raids and Derry suffered casualties as well. And when the US became involved, Northern Ireland became a major area for the American forces.” He then mentions a secret American bunker that is still buried in Derry. Tom talks about how involved Northern Ireland was during the war effort.

20:15 Tom: “But what it did was sharpen the difference between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland. Irish neutrality was then continued during the Cold War. When the NATO alliance

was formed in 1949, Ireland did not join whereas Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom which did join. So the division of Ireland becomes even more acute as the result of WWII.

20:55 Tom: "And the third thing that happened after WWII was that the United Kingdom introduced a system of social welfare which included a free health service and free unemployment insurance. It's known as the British Welfare State. And because Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, that also applied here. But it did not apply to the rest of Ireland. So Northern Ireland becomes very different socially from the rest of Ireland. What is happening is that the differences between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland are becoming sharper and sharper."

21:45 Tom: "But the grievances of the Nationalist minority were not going away. The Nationalist minority is still inside Northern Ireland unwilling to be a part of the United Kingdom. On top of this, they were subject to various levels of discrimination. It was particularly true here in Derry. The city at that time was governed by the Londonderry Corporation." Tom emphasizes that the name was Londonderry instead of Derry. Londonderry was used by Protestants and Unionists which was very uncomfortable for Catholics and Nationalists. "And the city had a clear, Nationalist majority. But the voting was arranged so that the Unionists (who took up about 1/3 of the population) controlled the corporation."

22:40 Tom: "The Londonderry Corporation was the focus of grievances of the Nationalists throughout Northern Ireland. It focused on issues such as public housing, the allocation of jobs in the city, and the fact that the majority seemed to have a minority vote. The result of this in 1967 as the formation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association." He brings up that this was the same time as Mr. Luther King and the struggle for civil rights on the US. So the fact that civil rights was in the title of the association was no accident. "On June 5, 1968, the civil rights march began to assemble with the intention of marching to articulate grievances over civil rights. The government of Northern Ireland banned the march. The police then dispersed the march by force."

24:30 Tom: "The middle of June, 1968, is the starting point for modern political development. Relations between the Nationalist community and the Northern Ireland government worsened throughout the winter of 1968-1969. What brought the crisis into focus was Derry once again." He says that on August 12 of every year, the Apprentice Boys of Derry hold a major parade entirely in a Protestant area. What happened in 1969 was called the Battle of the Bogside. It started on the 12th of August from the parade, and by the 14th, the British Army decided to intervene. Now the British government was fully involved and the rioting spread to Belfast. No one died during the Derry riots, but 10 people were killed in Belfast on that date.

27:10 Tom: "1969 saw Northern Ireland change forever. The events of 1969 were truly revolutionary. 1969 was the combination of what I've been talking about in the early 1920's. The tensions which had been there from the 1920's have come out in the late 1960's. Everything that has been done from 1969 to 2003 has been trying to get Northern Ireland back with some

kind of solution, containment, transformation, or whatever. What I was trying to do was to set the context for the people you are going to hear in the future.” He then asks if there are any other questions.

29:05 Question: “Was the internment right before the Battle of Bogside, or when does that fit in?”

29:10 Tom: “Internment was in August 1971. There were two IRA campaigns before that. One in the early years of WWII and one between 1956 and 1962. And these failed largely due to the lack of support in the Nationalist community. But the internment that people think about mostly was the one in August of 1971 when the provisional IRA got underway.”

29:55 Question: “Was the police force that came into Bogside in 1969 spurred by anything?”

30:15 Tom: “From October 1968 onwards, there was an increase in rioting in the Bogside. It came into focus particularly in early January 1969 when an early civil rights group decided to have a march from the center of Belfast to the center of Derry. The eastern side of the road (presumably in Derry) is predominantly Protestant and Unionist. On January 4, 1969, there were two serious attacks on the marchers. As a result of this, there was a lot of widespread rioting in Bogside.” He explains that this is when murals titled “You Are Now Entering Free Derry” popped up which told police that they cannot enter.

32:05 Question: “With the wall and the barricades and the Free Derry murals, did that keep the forces out?”

32:25 Tom: “What it really was a kind of assertion of independence from the British state. Security forces did go in but they entered with a heavily-armored presence. It became known for a long time as a no-go area.”

33:10 Someone in the audience says that there is a highrise on a street corner where IRA members would throw bombs and other objects off the top of the roof. But this building has long since been demolished. Someone else in the audience asked a question about the building and what it was being used for, but it was too difficult to hear.

34:30 Tom says that it is an interesting question and that it ties in with what he has to say at another lecture in a week. So he asks for the question to be put on hold for the later lecture.

34:45 Question: “I have two questions. During WWII, were the social welfare programs extended to Catholics?” Tom replies that they were. “And during WWII, what did the Republic of Ireland do with four of their ports?”

35:10 Tom: “That was a major source of grievance on the part of the British and then later the American government, and this has to do with geography. The 1921 Treaty between Britain and Ireland allowed for the use of four ports, one of which is Belfast.” Due to trouble with Germany

during WWI, the British all but demanded the use of these ports for their own ships. “But in 1938, the then Prime Minister in Dublin negotiated with Britain to evacuate the trading ports and the British agreed.” When the war began in 1939, the US and England begged Dublin for the use of their ports but the Republic of Ireland disagreed and remained neutral. “The Irish policy of neutrality in WWII was interesting because Ireland would cooperate with the allies to some extent.” Tom says that Ireland allowed allied planes to fly over their land, they’d secretly allow their citizens to join the British Army, and other things like that. But the Irish stayed neutral and the ports frustrated America and England.

39:10 Question: “Was Ireland’s neutrality in WWII due to their unfriendly relationship with Great Britain or with something else?”

39:35 Tom: “It was deemed as the test of Irish independence.” Tom asks how you test this, and it seems that Ireland tested this with not going to war. They wanted to show how independent they were. But at the end of the war, a representative of Ireland expressed his condolences to Germany on the death of Hitler. This made the US and England upset. But he also gave his condolences to America because FDR has passed three weeks earlier. So in the Ireland representative’s mind, he was being neutral while many countries didn’t see it in the same light.

42:00 Tom is reminded that the group is out of time. He then gives his permission to be videotaped, and the tape then ends.