

Tom Fraser Intro to the Issues 1/3

(This seems to be a continuation of the tape "Tom Fraser Intro to the Issues 1/2," but there appears to be a large chunk missing in between tapes. In the previous tape, Tom gave his permission to be taped and introduced what he was going to be talking about. However, it was only 4 minutes long. This tape starts out with Tom in the midst of his lecture.)

00:00 Tom: "I believe a historian who said that much of what we understand in history actually derives from geography. Those of you who have studied the history of the United States will know that. So much of what formed the United States of America actually derived from the nature of North American geography. And I think it's true of any society that you go to. If you look at German history, so much of German history is explained by the fact that the Germans are a powerful ethnic group in the middle of Europe. This is similar to France, Spain, and Italy. It doesn't matter which society you look at."

0:55 Tom: "The basic fact of Irish geography is perfectly clear, we are on an island. What we know about Ireland is that islands do evolve their sense of distinctive identity over a period of time. It doesn't matter what period of Irish history you look at. What you are going to find is that Irish things have their own identity. So the fact of Ireland being an island is the fundamental temperament of how Ireland evolved."

"But you are aware that we are an island lying next to another island just east of us called Great Britain which is a close and large island. At its closest point, we are only 30 miles from the British island. What I'm trying to get to is that there always has been a fundamental tension in Ireland."

"Now Ireland is an island with a distinct sense of identity. But it's an island that has always been in the pull of the larger and more powerful island to the east. And one of the major problems of Irish history is how, if at all, can Ireland escape from the almost magnetic pull of the larger British island to the east. If you understand that basic element of tension, I believe that you have understood one of the basic elements of tensions in development."

3:25 Tom: "If you are based in Britain and you look to the west, how does Ireland seem to you? The answer is quite simple, Ireland is part of your defense perimeter. And if you look at the course of British and Irish history, then you see that the island is essential to the defense of the British island. The phrase that was used for centuries was that Ireland was the back door to England. So if you are English or British, Ireland was seen as essential to your defense and therefore you had to ensure that Ireland was as firmly under your control as you could make it. And that has been true from the period in the 12th century when the English colonization of Ireland began and lasted until the end of the Cold War."

"One of the major speeches in the peace process here was made in 1990 by the British Minister responsible for Northern Ireland whose name is too hard to hear). He said 'Great Britain no longer has any economic or strategic interest in Northern Ireland.' So 1990 is effectively the year of the collapse of communism. But Northern Ireland was seen as essential to British defense interests."

5:45 Tom: "It's it's also relevant to know that Britain was always the wealthier island. Not only did it have more people, but it was more prosperous."

6:05 Tom: "But we'll get back to what I was talking about which was Britain's defense. What that leads to in the first of January, 1801, was the believed final act of union between Ireland and Britain. As we'll see in a moment, Ireland has been a part of the British system since the 12th century in the middle ages. But it was only on January 1801 that the two countries were formally united. And the title of the country becomes the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland."

"And the idea of the active union was to make a totally unified country. There had been a Parliament in Dublin down to 1801. That parliament had been abolished. The members of Parliament sat in London, there was no parliament in Dublin anymore. Ireland was represented by the parliament in London, but London took the decisions which governed Irish affairs."

7:40 Tom: "In 1801, you have this new country in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland." He brings up that the Cross of St. Patrick (the diagonal red stripes) was added to the Union flag. This means, symbolically that Ireland was incorporated into the full union of Britain. "But it was assumed that this act would create a single country. But if you fast-forward to 1900, what you will find is that 75% of the population of Ireland was dissatisfied with the Union and was demanding a kind of self-government for Ireland. This is what we know as Nationalism. That the people of Ireland should take the decisions rather than the parliament in London."

10:00 Tom: "So why 1900? By 1900, essentially what was being said was that for 75% of of the Irish population, the Union had failed. 75% of the Irish population was looking for some kind of self-government. Why is this?"

10:15 Tom: "Well there are three reasons. The first of these is religion. What set 75% of Ireland apart from Britain was religion. The British, the English, the Scots, and the Welsh were and are predominantly Protestant. These different groups of the British nation were made Protestant. But this had not happened in Ireland. 75% of the Irish population remained Catholic."

"In Europe in 2003, we are overwhelmingly a secular continent. In 1900 that wasn't true. People took their religion extremely seriously. And their religion is identity. Europe has changed in the past 100 years. But in 1900, religious identity was very strong. So the fact that the bulk of Ireland was Catholic set them apart from the majority of the British population."

"What had reinforced their sense of alienation was the fact of full Catholic emancipation. Full Catholic emancipation did not come until 1829. The plain fact was that in the 18th century, Catholics suffered disabilities both in Ireland and in Britain, in terms of representation of parliament, in terms of holding office, and other disadvantages. And the assumption in Ireland in 1801 was that the Union would bring full emancipation to Catholics. And it did, but not until 1829. In other words, it took nearly 30 years. And during these 30 years when Catholics were in Ireland for emancipation, that sense of grievance and alienation became inbuilt. So Catholics from the start, never really felt a part of the British nation."

13:15 Tom: "The second reason for the emergence of nationalism was under economic

reasons. I made the point that Britain was almost the more prosperous of the two islands. What you got in the 19th century was the industrial transformation of Britain. Britain was the pioneer of the world's industrial revolution because Britain had the raw materials to develop industry. So Britain developed the great industrial cities like Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow, Swansea, and other which made Britain the economic powerhouse of the world at that time."

"Now stand back and think of Ireland and think of what resources we do not have. We don't have coal, we don't have iron ore, we don't have any of the ingredients to make an industrial revolution. Ireland only has one raw material in abundance which is rain (a few laughs appear). So the one raw material that we do possess is rain and what that makes for us is a great big fire hume. But if you look at the 19th century, you'll see a rapidly industrializing Britain and then Ireland, which is a big farm. And that increased the differential between the two islands."

"But then came the farming calamity that was the Great Famine which began in September 1845 and lasted until 1849. The Great Famine was a catastrophic failure with the potato crop. Potatoes were the basic diet of the Irish people. It failed through disease and between 1845 and 1849, 1 million people on the island died of either starvation or disease. And up to 2 million migrated to the United States. It's the one thing about Ireland in the 19th century that people remember. And in Nationalist communities in Belfast, you will see wall murals commemorating the Great Famine and the Great Hunger. That is something that has existed in Irish folk history from that day to this. And you can't underestimate the importance of the famine because it lead to the very simple question in people's minds: 'What use is the Union to us if it results in a calamity of such enormous proportions?' People advocated for a government of their own in Dublin, free from London. So the economic dimensions focused clearly on the famine which was one of the fundamental returns of Nationalism."

17:10 Tom: "And the third element, which I think is true of any nationalism, is the idea of culture. Nationalism was the great ideology of the age in Europe and in the United States during the 19th century. People asked themselves fundamental questions such as 'What makes me what I am? What makes me Italian? What makes me German?' People asked themselves the same question and came up with ideas about identity, religion, and Irish culture. And there was an enormous revival of Irish culture in the late 19th century. So by 1900, men and women in Ireland could take pride in the cultural achievements of Ireland. Most of us would argue that unless you had some pride for the nation, then nationalism is barely possible."

18:15 Tom: "So these are the three arguments which you have to understand in terms of where Irish nationalism came from and where it still sits today. The phenomenon of nationalism still remains as an essential part of political discourse in Northern Ireland today."

18:45 Tom: "But 25% of the population did not identify with nationalism, the identified with unionism. And unionism is the wish to retain the union. Unionism actually takes its name from the Union which came from 1801. So why is it that 25% of the population failed to identify with nationalism and wished to retain the link with Britain?"

19:30 Tom: "Well the first of these things is religion. The unionists were overwhelmingly

Protestants and were overwhelmingly concentrated in Ulster, the northern province. So where have these Protestants come from and why did they fail to identify with the rest of Ireland? This takes us back to the starting point."

20:15 Tom: "The British parliament had always spread from Dublin, which was always the British base in Ireland. The province of Ulster, a northern province, had always been the hardest nut to crack from a military point of view. Ulster under its traditional Irish leaders have always resisted the spread of English power most tenaciously. But by the early 17th century, that traditional Irish power was breaking. And in the year 1607, the two leaders of the local Irish society (two Earls or landowners) with their followers left Ulster. It's known as the flight of the Earls. And these men with their followers left for Spain. What that meant was that the town was left without leaders. The government in London saw its chance and declared the land for the English Crown. They also instituted the policy of plantation. The idea of plantation was a very simple one. Protestant settlers from Scotland and England would be brought across and planted on the lands so that Ulster would remain firmly loyal to Britain. This is when, in 1613, when Derry was renamed to Londonderry." He mentions that this is confusing for many travelers because Catholics refer to it as Derry while Protestants refer to it as Londonderry.

23:25 Tom: "So the idea of plantation was centered on thousands of Protestant settlers from Scotland and from England travelling over here to settle. That is, quite simply, the politics of the Protestant population. That's why the people who study the Northern Ireland conflict define it as a conflict in ethnic terms. These are two communities with very different ethnic ways. Now that does need some modification because over the centuries, people intermarried so the lines are not as clearly drawn. But nonetheless, the Catholic population in Northern Ireland sees itself as the descendents of the native Irish population. But the Protestant community in Northern Ireland sees itself as the descendents of the Protestants who settled here in the 17th century."

24:45 Tom: "Before I leave the aspect of religion, go back to the essential point that I made 10 minutes ago. If you're dealing with the political situation in 1900, you're dealing with people who believe very strongly in religious identity. And as far as Protestants were concerned, what they had feared in 1900 was being dominated by some kind of parliament in Dublin in which they would be a 25% minority."

25:30 Tom: "The second thing identifying Nationalism was the economy. The economy of Ulster in the 19th century developed very differently to the economy of the rest of Ireland. Essentially from the 1850's in the two major cities in Ulster, Belfast and Derry, became industrial cities. Essentially they became outcrops of the British industrial system." He says that the audience has been in Derry long enough to discover some relics and factories in the city from the 1850's onwards. He then asked where the shirt manufacturers in Derry sold their shirts. "The answer is quite simple, in the British market and in the British empire."

26:35 Tom: "But much more important is not Derry, but rather Belfast. Belfast did turn out to be a major industrial city on the lines of industrial cities like Manchester, Pittsburgh, or some other cities. And in particular from the 1850's, it developed one of the great shipbuilding industries in

the world.” He brings up that Belfast is responsible for creating the Titanic. Tom then describes the immensity of the shipyard 100 years ago when it had 30,000 workers on board. It was the largest shipbuilding complex in the world at the time. Today there are only 90 workers though.

28:05 But along with the shipyard, Belfast had other things as well. “Belfast had the biggest rope factory in the world. It also had enormous employment for women. Belfast was the world capital of the linen industry and it employed something like 70,000 women. Ask yourself what the outlets for Belfast industry were for. Outlets for the industry were in the British empire. If you go back 100 years, the British empire was a system of globalization. It controlled 1/4 of the world and its population. And the product of Belfast was sold in Vancouver, Cape Town, Singapore, or Melbourne or any of the great cities of the British empire. In other words, the industrial dynamic of Belfast was to remain part of the British system.” And because Belfast was selling its product all around the British empire, the city’s only concern was that their product was continuing to be sold around the world. The economy of Belfast was really independent of what was happening in Ireland.”

30:10 Tom: “And finally, you can take on the element of culture. Protestants in the late 19th century have different traditions than they do today. The most famous series of events in the city’s history were the scenes in Derry in 1688. To understand the mental world of the Protestant and Unionist community, you have to understand the significance of 1688.”

31:00 Tom: “We have to focus for a moment on the civil war which happened throughout Britain and Ireland in these critical years. In 1688, the King of both Britain and Ireland was King James II who was a Catholic. And in 1688, there was a revolution in Britain in which King James II was opposing his Protestant daughter and her husband, William III. And what developed was a civil war throughout Britain and Ireland between these two sides. Half for King James II and half for William III. That civil war was largely followed in Ireland because as a Catholic, King James II knew that he could rely on the support of a predominantly Catholic Ireland. The Protestants, as we know, rallied for William III.” He exclaims that this could be a metaphor for Protestant resistance against a predominantly Catholic Ireland.

32:40 Tom mentions that the largest parade is hosted by the Apprentice Boys in August when some 15,000 people parade through the city of Derry. “Protestants see the defense of Derry as an essential part of their sense of identity. The Protestant forces of King William III defeated the Catholic army of King James II at the Battle of the Boyne. This was the great battle, as far as the Protestants of Ireland are concerned. That is their great victory. In 1795, Protestants here came together to form the Orange Order. In forming this exclusively Protestant society, they would bond with the traditions of the late 17th century. But this Orange Order was the driving force behind the formation of Ulster Unionism in 1905. And what we have by this time is the polarization of Irish politics which is Unionism that is comprised almost exclusively by Protestants and Nationalism which is overwhelmingly Catholic.” He then asks if there are any questions so far.

35:25 Question: “So the Siege of Derry was basically Protestants sieging Derry because they

didn't want the Catholics to take over?"

35:40 Tom: "Well the Protestants were inside the walls. And basically what happened in 1688 and 1689 was that Protestants from all over Ireland were afraid of what they saw as the ascension of Catholic power. The interesting thing about Derry is it's the last wall-city in Europe. There are fortifications in the 17th century later than those, but the walls of Derry (from 1618) were put there as a defense mechanism for the Protestant population. So the Protestants have been brought in as the minority and they are treated as the minority. So there has to be some place of refuge for them."

36:45 Tom: "So when trouble broke out in 1688, Derry was a small city then in terms of its population. But when trouble started, Protestants from all over Ireland fled to Derry because they knew the walls were there. And usually this was a tricky spot for a siege. Once you get inside a besieged city, you have cut yourself off from supplies and you are utterly dependent on the supplies that you have within the walls. Many more people died in the Siege of Derry because of disease and hunger than actual fighting. That's perfectly normal during a siege. So as far as the Protestants have told us, the siege lasted a total of 105 days which is the longest siege in Irish history."

38:20 Question: "Who controlled Ireland before the Earls?"

38:35 Tom: "It's complicated because the English base in Ireland was always doubling. English power in Ireland was always up and down the east coast because that coast is low-lying and has a fertile land. It was known as the Pale which was the English part of Ireland. But if you were outside the Pale, you were no longer under British law. You were then under Irish law which was the case for hundreds of years. By the late 16th century, there was a major power struggle between England and Spain. And by this time, the British decided it was time to gain control of the whole of Ireland. So by the 1590's, the English were steadily expanding their military power throughout Ireland. And the critical point was around 1603 when the English forces succeeded in gaining control of part of the island. In 1607, two Irish leaders decided to leave. In actual fact, we don't know why they left. But the British government saw its chance and sent in its own people."

42:15 Question: "Since Ireland was predominantly Catholic, is there any ways that France would come over (the question was difficult to hear, but this should be the question asked)?"

42:20 Tom: "Yes. The French were very much in support of King James II in 1688."

42:35 Question: "Well he was married to a French Queen, but why did France come over?"

42:45 Tom: "What the French did in 1688-1689 was send over generals and specialists to assist King James II. (He then said something else involving the French, but it was too hard to hear) The Jacobite army sent over two French generals and it was their misfortune that within days of the siege that these generals were killed in combat."

“So the French involvement in that period and the Spanish involvement 100 years ago does explain the English occupation within Ireland as a threat to security. In some way or another, Ireland was always tied to these conflicts.”

This tape then ends.