

Dorone: So just to start there are just a few introduction questions for everyone to understand who you are and what is the IRA etc but im going to guide you through this. So just to start can you please state your name, age and a bit about your education?

Brendan: My name is Brendan Curren, I'm 64 years of age, I had next to no education. I left school with no qualification and that's all.

D: Was there a reason for you leaving school in such an early age?

B: I was sent into the school which you were always threatened with -you if you didn't buck your ways up, you were going to end up in school. And I describe it as a school of life. Rather than school of education. So I went there and met really colourful characters. Who like myself had no time for education. Who were living in the late 60's early 70's and the civil rights and all that stuff was unfolding. The other backdrop that is, I would have been taken out of school a lot, my father was a docker and he would have worked on boats. And I would have gone with his lunch, and his breakfast and stuff like that, which I was delighted to do. But it meant me miss a lot of stuff in school. And to be honest, I really didn't have time for education.

D: And what about where you live now?

B: I live now in Westborough which is in south Armagh it's south side of model village I don't know, Quaker model village, Quaker module village is a somewhere were there's no pubs, no booking shops, no gambling and it would be 50-50 in the religious breakdown, what would be seen as a Unionist or Protestant area. And it's between Newry which would be very Nationalist to Camlough which will also be very nationalist and the gateway to South Armagh.

D: And where you born there?

B: No, I was born in Newry in a place called Castle -street

D: So then did you move? Or was it a family move?

B: They were knocking the houses down so we had to move to a new development, and then shortly after that I went to prison and then I come out of prison and lived back in Newry for a number of years. So then I moved, my wife and her family lived a field away so I moved and stayed here so.

D: So that's nice, you're close to family then. And how about your occupation? What do you do today?

B: I'm a swimming teacher, im a life-guard and im a director of my own security company.

D: And perhaps you can tell us a bit before what it was like?

B: Before what?

D: Sorry. You said you were doing different jobs in security, life guard and swimming instructor

B: Before that I was a district councillor for 30 years. I represented the people for 30 years. And I was a member of Sinn Fein for 28 of those years, representative of Sinn Fein and then I left Sinn Fein and I went independent for 2 years. And then I finished what I had always planned for 30 years long and then I went back to what I was before I started which was a life guard.

D: Fascinating. And did you go and work straight after coming out of jail? Or was it a process?

B: No that was difficult because, when the war was on, it was very hard to get employment. For instance, if you drive me, you would get harassment, you would be stopped if you were seen with me. Once you'd be stopped, anyone who would be seen talking to you would be stopped (8:00) and it just rippled right out. So at the current situation where people really didn't want to employ me because it was too much hassle. Too much danger to them as well as the threat of working in a place where you could be killed. So I started to do what I knew which was security, I knew a lot about security, I was in the army before I went to prison and I knew a good bit about security and then I got into the local concerts scene. I started to work in the local concert scene in someone else's name, I had to pretend that I was someone else. And I met a man who I was in prison with, at one of the major concerts, and we exchanged numbers and then I started to employ people myself. And that has happened up until now so, 1988/1987 I've been doing concerts, and I now employ, through the summer session maybe 200 people or so.

D: And can I ask, just also to clarify, you said you were in the army before you went to jail, was the army not the IRA?

B: No the army was the National Army of the Republic of Ireland. I was double jollyng.

D: Yes you were, that's why I wanted to clarify.

D: And what is your living standard today and perspective today? Has your living standard gone up or down relating to your parents and grandparents?

B: Very much up. We own our own home, we have a spacious house in a nice area, and I live with my wife and my son. My wife has recently retired but has gone back to the health service on a 2 day a week basis. My son works at the health service as well, he's an assistant psychologist, and my daughter who works for us, lives just about a mile away in the village. Yes but things are much more buoyant than for my parents.

D: A lot of people has said that as well that the situation in Ireland is much better than it used to be.

B: Newry for instance was a place where employment was not created. Because people were the wrong religion. Most of the fact decent jobs were located in Protestant areas. Unionist areas. And it would be a common place seeing men in the corner talking because there was no employment for them. My father had an occasional employment as a docker and to get benefit you had to work 13 weeks a year to allow you to get enough credits together you know social help. So that's the way that were.

D: And did you say that he had a house on his name?

B: No. he rented a house.

D: Because you weren't, again from people I've been speaking to, you couldn't buy a house as a Catholic up north.

B: No. Not a chance no. And nor get educated. It was only a small fraction on Nationalists in Newry who would have had good education. They would have actually went to the next stage. Even though our town Newry had a lot of really good schools, it was exceptional to go to the next stage in Queen's University (Belfast).

D: And why do you think in Newry they had more options?

B: They didn't have more options but, and still today they have a, schools in Newry have one of the highest percentage of young people in education, on higher level of education. Two schools in Newry that would be really high achievement schools, but there was a deficit when going to university because people couldn't afford it. So the result was that only very few Catholics went to University until the late 60's and that's the way it was in Newry.

D: And what is the main difficulty you encounter today?

B: Me? As an ex-prisoner? I have major difficulties. I cant go to America for instance. Im not allowed into America, im a terrorist. I can't get certain jobs, I can't even get insurance for my home, I can't work as apostman. I can run the country, but I cannot be a post man. So im technically seen as a criminal still.

D: That must be very hurtful and I do have a few questions about that because I feel it's a really important place to talk about this because I think you guys were dealt misjustice here. When I grew up we thought of the IRA as freedom fighters. And what im trying to understand is why, why did things change that people like you're saying now, are considering you as a terrorist?

B: That's the government. That's the state I mean, we live in the British part of Ireland. On the British, mainly on the part that we live in. so it serve the judicial system which deals with how you were taught so it controls all those other things. And the political parties, they haven't played a good role in it either, because there was something like 70 thousand ex-political prisoners on both sides of the divide, and they never have cleared up this issue of criminal. So when Bobby Sands and all these people died in hunger strike, not being treated as criminals. but technically we are all still criminals. Now Martin McGuinness and Arlene Foster came up with this Micky Mouse version you know where it's really up to the employer to decide whether they see us as criminals and that makes you half a criminal, because if you're employing me and you think the IRA fought a fair and honest campaign, then you employ me. But if you didn't, then im a criminal. And that's the same with unionists as well so, so it's not a resolution. And it effects your children as well because if your children or your grandchildren go for jobs that need high level security clearance, they would be denied it on the basis of me. So it's something that goes on, and it's something that isn't being addressed.

D: I'm very sorry to hear that, that must be a very heavy burden to have on you. We're gonna come back to this but later on, because as I said I think your experiences is something that

should be highlighted and spoken and heard. Which group of people would you most count on? Family, neighbours, colleagues, friends?

B: FAMILY.

D: How much time do you spend with them?

B: Lots, we work together, we live together, we socialise together so we'll be a very close family.

D: Do you represent and are you represented in your home country and where you are living now?

B: I don't think so. Politics here is very very much on religious basis. So we won't vote for them, and they won't vote for us and there's no grouping which represents the entire nationalist community, even *in* the Nationalist community and there is none in general which will reflect a Nationalist view at the upper level. So I fought for things like the right to vote and all the rest of it, but I wouldn't vote for any. Not now.

D: And are there political groups or non-political groups that you are engaged with?

B: No.

D: Are you in touch with other members of the IRA?

B: I would have had lots of friends that I would have spent a lot of time in prison with.

D: And you are in touch with them?

B: Oh yeah.

D: OK so this is just a bit about the intro and is there anything you'd like to add for this section?

B: No, let's continue.

D: What does the word peace mean to you?

B: Peace means something that is equal to anyone. It means equality, it means fairness, it means that people get the place that they want. Some of it deals with what happened during the war so that's what peace means to me.

D: On the ground level yea, you're in a place where there's no war. Do you think there's peace there?

B: Ah no, we're dealing with the legacy of the peace. I mean I spoke about the way prisoners are treated, so there's no equality. And unless there's equality there cannot be peace. Lots of people would like to know how and why their loved ones were killed? How they were killed and then from the state there's lots of dirty dealings. And supplying of guns of people to kill people, how people would kill people, bringing people to and from killing people, so to me it's an uneasy peace.

D: And I think the next question is quite personal but let's see where you take it. Just to say all these questions were collected by all these members from all across Europe some of them

touch countries in terms of socialism and some more of joining the EU and the different aspects like this, so I know the questions might sound a bit general but I'll try to make them better — to surprise you a bit less. What is the sound of war? And what is the sound of peace?

B: The sound of war is the radio. People lived by the radio. My mother lived by the radio. Every morning you'd get up, you'd listen to the radio to see who was killed last night. Every time you went to bed you listened to the radio, to see how many was killed today. If only 5 people were killed today, that was good if 6 were killed yesterday. So that was good news. So that's how people lived and I remember whenever the cease fire happened, my mother who would have been a very strong Republican woman, wasn't happy because they'd be no news anymore — and that's how ingrained — I mean my mother would have been 75 years of age and that's how she saw it, there's no news anymore. Cause we had lived by it. The sound of peace is, I don't know the sound of peace yet, I still have people who would like to kill me, I still believe that there are people who would want to kill me, and I have to take precautions, even though at times the risk is higher in some counties north it's not peace. Then there is an aspect of it were until things are dealt with properly, until there's an equableness, until people recognise the things that were done and acknowledge that they were wrong and shouldn't have happened, peace to me sounds like unsolved.

D: Do you think peace is a relation with oneself? Or is it between people, or states?

B: It's both. I mean, I have to feel that I have got a fair deal or it's not peace. As I said you know, employment, your ability to go to companies I mean, I find it very offensive that I can't go to some companies like America, Canada places like that, with my children. To enjoy things, that people who were apart of the war, or you see the psna the British army, they can move freely. But because I fought for my company, I am denied those rights. And lots of other things like, insurance, I mean something as simple as insurance, I mean I will have to transfer my home over to my wife's name because there wont be any insurance on it. And lots of people, lots of the ex-prisoners, sort of obey that in a line way but if something happens and they find out that paid insurance all that long they are not gonna... So there's loads of things like that so all those things come in to recognise as someone who took part in a legitimate war, recognising that what we've done was legitimate, even though it had serious consequences and impact on other people and other people's lives. But it's about that one sidedness you know, even in the health, for instance if I had a mental health issue, as a result of an act I took part in during the war, I cannot go and seek medical health help because the minute I will say this is why im having mental health issues, the minute they'll report it and I'll go to prison again. So there's lots of things that aren't solved yet, there are lots of walking wounded who cannot reveal of the different things and that's on both sides. And that sends the trauma down through the generations. The same as any other country — so my children would feel it, and their children would feel it, so there wont be peace for a long time. And the high instances of drugs and all the rest of that, is all related to some of that stuff. I mean pre-1980, '86 there would be next to no drugs in Ireland ever. And then the authorities discovered, if you give young people drugs, if you allow them to have access to them, they wont be worried about fighting the conflict and all the rest. So they allowed drugs to come through Loyalist and all the rest of it. And then Ireland turned out to be as drug orientated as anywhere else. So there were different aspects of it that were still, but there's a lot of the trauma been passed and until there's an equality and equality as taken some of that stuff will still go on and as well some of the horrors that

happened in each family, it will pass down through the unborn babies and all the rest of it even without a word been saying.

D: And can I dig a bit on that point of the drugs, so you think it was an actually conspiracy by the British government

B: No, it was a policy. There's no conspiracy. Its an act of policy to allow young Loyalists to traffic drugs into Nationalist communities, and that's how it happened. And that's how it became so prevalent.

D: And can I ask, I know in Derry they have quite a strong group fighting against drugs essentially, is there something similar in Newry?

B: No and I don't accept that. That the fighting against the drugs is like putting your finger in the dam. The fighting taking place in Derry in my opinion is about doing something that gives a group of armed people currency in that community. So I don't believe for one minute that they are out there helping their community. There are lots of ways we can all help our community, we don't have to shoot anyone. In fact, the IRA proved that shooting people. Because in Newry there were numerous people shot numerous times and it didn't stop them doing what they were doing. And it proved that it was counter-productive. And that's not to say that it stopped it for a while. But, for people that say Derry that are they're involved in this is rubbish.

D: What do you think then is the way to stop it? Just as a side note from your experience

B: I don't think there is any stopping it. I think its education, just keeping young people safe while they are doing it, I think the argument for legalisation and all the rest is another thing, but there's no stopping. It's there, it's here to stay, its about limiting, its about stopping it if you can, but it's all to making young people safe.

D: In this current political situation, what you consider as main split and polarisation in regards to power?

B: Northern Ireland? It's us and them. A good idea is only a good idea if it's our idea. So there's no union of people, and that's the legacy and that's the gateway of peace. It's a Nationalist, both a Nationalist to hit the people that are standing, are both Unionist although there no time for personal stand, but one of us is better than one of them. And that's not right.

D: And im assuming you were listening to the news as well in the Republic, so in the recent general election Sinn Fein coming in strong after a 100 years, how did you perceive that especially since you said you were a representative of Sinn Fein for a long while?

B: you see, I was a part of that movement, that movement was suppose to be open and equal to everyone. It was supposed to be fair, it was supposed to do the old ways but cronyism is one. And people say to me why do you not want Sinn Fein to be in government, because I don't think they will rule a government in a fairly good way, why do I say that and I say to people shows me one person who works for Sinn Fein who isn't a member of the party? Show me just one who isn't somebody's daughter or somebody's son. Now I thought and other people thought we'll do right with that but cronyism just circle in a different way.

D: You know I actually haven't heard anyone express it this way,

B: But ask them all, show me one person but that's a pre-requisite of working party and the party has lots of party workers on the pay roll. And this is coming from someone who never, in all the years involved in this circle, has ever had 1 penny from the Republic — not 1 penny. Not even half a penny, so I can say that with all honesty, I never ever had a wage of any sort, but there are I know lots of people who do, if you cannot unless you remember — But show me them — I haven't seen them. And I know how it works. I know how things are worked out. There used to be an advert years ago, whenever the civil rights was on and there would have been an advert on TV and it showed someone with a mullet, banging a square head into a round whole to make it fit) and they're still doing that. They are still square head to around whole.

D: What you just said was very interesting to me and I want to expand on that. You were saying that you cannot get insurance you cannot travel to many places because you're considered a criminal, a terrorist

B: Yes. I can't adopt children, I can't be a postman but I can be the leader of a company.

D: Do you have a dual passport?

B: No I've only ever held an Irish passport, I could have two

D: And do you think the Irish government has done anything to make your life easier? do they have any sort of scheme? Health insurance, health benefits? to help fighters like you?

B: Nothing. In fact it's the opposite, I don't think they do enough to outreach they talk it but they don't really do I think.

D: But you don't get that hostile relationship that you would from the British government?

B: I don't think they care about us at all to be honest.

D: Do you feel abandoned?

B: Ah it's the way it's always been, so not really, because that's the way it's always been and it hasn't been any better. I mean we don't have rights which we should have for the presidents of Ireland's election and stuff like that, no that I care. Because it's usually somebody who is selected in some silly way, so no I don't really think it really feeds to us, no. its irrelevant. I mean, I only live 12 miles from Dundalk (Republic of Ireland) and I would never ever dream of going to Dundalk, even though most of my work is in the South, the Republic. Socially I would never think it. If I didn't work in the Republic, I would probably only go on occasions.

D: Do you practice peace in your own surroundings?

B: Yes, I would be very fair, very outreaching, and I would forget in a positive way a lot of things which have happened to me and to mine. I have done things which have set aside my own prejudice, so yeah.

D: And do you see yourself individually, collectively or socially responsible for bringing or maintaining peace?

B: I would be responsible, I cleared that very active role yeah.

D: Can you give me an example maybe?

B: Well I took part in campaigns for equality. I took part in campaigns to bring about the Good Friday Agreement. I took part in campaigns to get people to accept what I believe is a reasonable, if there was ever such a thing as a fairer, reasonably better place for what I've had my whole life and all place, services come with problems and there is a dark shadow over a new place service but I believe unless our people start to become part of it, we'll never be able to knock down those walls. And there's still a dark hand behind the face of it and I'd be the first to recognise that. But I think unless we all get involved, that's as good as it's ever going to be. And I don't think that's good enough for my children or my children's children. I don't think it's acceptable. And sit back and just shout: "Brits Out, PSNI OUT" plays no value whatsoever. That didn't happen in the past and it's not going to happen in the future. We need to actively do something about it.

D: And you said you were advocating for the peace agreement?

B: Yes.

D: And did you feel any backlash from advocating for it?

B: Oh, yes of course in the... yes I would very publicly campaign for it, and would have taken personal ridicule and maybe have been targeted as a result of that, in ridicule and maybe in more serious ways. But yes I did.

D: Correct me if I'm wrong, but wasn't it because of the peace agreement, when Gerry Adams signed his part of it, then he got a visa to the States?

B: Yes.

D: Does that not make you feel angry? You're saying you can't ever go to the States

B: I think I mean I said that when I even was in the party, there were people who were allowed in and out. And needless to say these people put the ladder up the hanger. Then, which, I mean there was a time whenever Bill Clinton was there were they should have very clearly and unashamedly and unapologetically demanded that people who fought in the conflict were entitled. So to come up with this whole thing of the peace process I mean, one of things that they should have said was you know what see if you don't want all these people who were involved in the conflict should be allowed to work in other countries and take them away and let them see things differently. And they didn't do that. And this have yet failed to do any of that. I think the plight of prisoners, whether it's a social plight whether it's a political plight or whether it's an emotional plight it has been forgotten about. On both sides and there are lots and lots of casualties. Walking casualties of the war.

D: Do you think there are or were institutions that are responsible for bringing or maintaining peace? Like it can let's say the state, welfare state, civil society, religious organisations.

B: No. I think that some of the institutions and I talk about the Catholic institutions, work hand in hand with the state. Who tried to alienate certainly Republicans like me, from my community, who for instance wouldn't allow me into a chapel if I was dead with a "tri-colour" who would have come in to the prisons and try talk up the top of the injustices and there were

individuals but I mean the State, was allowed to be a standing, sorry not the state, the Church was allowed to be a stand alone element educator and all the rest of it and the prize for that was, helping the British government, to keep Republicanism and Nationalism down. I mean there's no doubt about it. And as well as that part of it come in to the sexual abuse. The State turned a blind eye because they knew that the church was doing a good job on keeping down sedation in all the rest of the elements of our uprising.

D: And when you mean the state do you mean the Republic state or Northern Ireland?

B: Well, both. The church very much spread on both sides of the border.

D: OK, I'll move to another question then, is peace a result of ones personal or generational historical experience of war, deprivation, injustice or social conflict?

B: It's certainly not an individual, it's from a whole community, it has to be something which impacts and effects and intends to resolve in a fair way. However way you see it. So peace is never going to take people back, peace is never going to take the experiences of prison, and hardship and discrimination, harassment, it's never going to be able to that so, but it recognises it and moves forward in away which is equal to everyone. And not hiding or taking aside, so that's it.

D: And can I ask you about your experience then, you growing up you experienced the Troubles on your own flesh, but did your parents feel it much? you know cause you were saying you are all from around Newry which is quite Nationalist.

B: No. not as much, I mean our house, my family home, would have been a very open house. There was a public house or a bar on our street, and it would have been frequented by a both communities. and when the bar was closed, people would have come for the afters to our house, to finish the drinking and my mother would have made soup and stuff on the stove. There were Unionists who would have frequented my home. The sad thing about it I mean, my children, my son is 33 and my daughter is 28 or thereabouts — and they had to wait until they went to University and actually met Protestants as friends, now they would have seen Protestants but to actually engage, socialise or interact — with they had to go to school which was a shameful. Uniforms were, and still are, a symbol of this side or that side. You know the brown uniform, you know the green uniform, were if they all had them in the same colour with just a different crest it would have made it so much easier. So no they would not have, even though they would have experienced the social deprivation, they would have experienced the unemployment, they would have experienced the sectarian employment, they wouldn't have been involved in a struggle of any sort.

D: And then what did push you to get involved?

B: Now this might sound funny, I was the child of the 60's. and in our street, we were the first people to have television. So everybody came to our house to see this television, had all these door on to let the air out, so we always would have had the television and we were brought up with television and movies. And in the movies even though now looking back some of them were so blatantly wrong, you always believed in the right guy. You always believed the right will always prevail. And that you always had to fight the good fight. And when you've seen injustices, and when you've seen the streets, when you've seen the one sided policing, when you seen a policing that didn't represent my community, I never knew Catholic policeman and

you've seen the army, the British army coming who didn't protect my community, all those things fed into what you are and your sense of right. And as I said right is right doesn't matter where it is. And you know, and that background from television and your parents and not so much the Church, you know you're supposed to do the right thing, and when you've seen foreigners on your streets with guns, I mean, you didn't need to get educated to know that that wasn't right. So, it was right to have insurrection and that's the way I saw it.

D: I can relate to that you know, there is always that one sided thing of us and them yeah. Us and the enemy. So I was the black sheep of the family because I always went with the "enemy". So I was friends with people you shouldn't be friends with, but that's the other side of things as well, but for me then that was a personal fight. It's the prejudices that I had, its what my family has brought me up to be like, so

B: The white sheep of the family might be a better description .

D: Yeah, so I was really taken by that, we grow to be our own individuals and we fight for whats really important. So the next question, do you think people volunteer to go to war? Or is it a personal choice?

B: It was a community choice. I mean lots of people were I lived, were members of the Republican movement, of the Civil Rights movement, and taking part in the conflict. And it was popular and it was wide spread throughout our town. And it wasn't religious. It had nothing to do with religion. This is where people get mixed up. People think it was all about religion. It had nothing whatever to do with religion. And where religion came in to it was 800 years ago whenever the British came to our country. The religion of those people were of Protestant religion. And then they went back, took whatever they needed and then they moved back. And then they came back again, and we fought against them because we were people who did not give in easy. So what they decided was coming back and forward all the time it would be much easier to leave people here. A garrison — to keep us down when needed. And the religion of that garrison was Protestant. And the descendants of those people who were in that garrison has descended to be protestant. And of any of the jobs and the security, any of the jobs in the place, the civil service, all those people happened to be protestant. That's the only part of it of religion. They are not being killed, or they weren't being attacked because they were protestant. But they were attacked because they were supporters or members of the British security force. Nothing to do with religion. That was just how it was to be portrait to show stupid Irish people, fighting among themselves because of religion. But there was no religion.

D: Who do you think is profiting from war?

B: I think the British government profited because it got an unequal skin set from what was happening in NI. To pebble it all across the world, there's also other armies who came and were in a visitor role, to see how the conflict was managed and riot control and all those other from a simple to tool to a not so simple. So the governments that's basically it yeah.

D: And how do you think that effects posts-war politics?

B: I don't know. I think it's just the way it was . I mean you still have the same, the British government are still doing the same stuff that they've always done. They are just doing it in a more subliminal and un-militaristic way. But there's still that level of discrimination I believe in

the establishments and the funding. I mean there's still, Newry has never been funded, there's never been factories, what they've done is put factories into our area in the 60s for a 10, granted for a 10 year old period and when the 10 years were up the factories failed. Which wasn't the same in the Unionist, Loyalist area. A lot of the funding would have went in to the areas were the MPs were, So.

D: It's very interesting because there's a big Unionist community up in Derry, and the city has the worst unemployment, it's the second worst city in the UK to live in. people have nothing, so

B: Equally some of the Unionists have nothing. In the Shankill road for instance. People in the Shankill road are young people are some of the most uneducated. part of it is was because they didn't need to be educated, because they knew where they were going to get their jobs. There is no sense of going to university, cause I was going to work in the shipyard. Why would I go and stop that. You're gonna go and get a job in the shipyard like your father and his father and his father. So what conditions in working class Unionists area for every bit is bad as it were a Nationalist area but they were told shut up because it's the other side.

D: So that then served the agenda? What they wanted to have is active people backing them up from wherever?

B: Yeah, you're in our side.

D: You obviously testified to fighting in a war, did someone in your family fight in a war?

B: My grandfather was in the British army which would have been World War I and he would have been in the army around that time and I'm not sure if he played an active role in it or not, but I know that he was de-mobbed under illness, that was 1914 or 1913.

D: So he didn't actually tell you about the war?

B: No, no it's something they never spoke about. Other members of my family would have been involved in the Republican movement in 2 different degrees. My father and mother, I mean our home would have been used as a safe house, you would have woken up in the morning with strangers in your house that didn't live there. And there was only one reason they were there, because they were hiding there, going to or coming from military action.

D: Military action fighting in the Irish Army?

B: Fighting in the IRA against the British army.

D: Did you hear much of their stories then? They probably had, just from hosting a lot of people a lot of stories to tell?

B: No. It was very secretive about them, nobody spoke about them, you didn't speak about them, they came and they went. I'm sure there were lots of people who have done that but nobody spoke about it.

D: Do you think testimonies of war contribute to peace building?

B: I think so and I think a lot of them have lost I think. The opportunity has been lost. Even social stories

D: I agree with you there isn't much documentation, even of the war of independence. If you try and find testimonies it's just not there

B: Yeah.

D: Do you think peace has advanced the society we live in?

B: I think it has. I think it had advanced the society I live in. things have become much better, things aren't as bad as they were, people aren't as cautious as they were once, although there is still a level of cautiousness, you know even what people say or what people like on facebook. People still think there are people out there who will hold to account. And that's from all communities, in Loyalist communities, Para militarists are still very very active and still suppress community.

D: I'll move to the next question and then I'll hit that point again, do you think peace is related to distribution of wealth/ownership of property?

B: It should be but it's not.

D: Can you give me a few examples of it?

B: There has not been a peace dividend — a peace dividend that they talk about — there hasn't been investment in our community, we were always told when the war is over, its going to be better. Because people would meaningful living, this money that was spent on the bombings, the army and now will be invested in the community. Non of that. So no, there has been no peace dividend and certainly not from my point of view. Nothing has changed as far...I still have the discrimination. You still have the prejudice, and I don't see anybody else with much more.

D: When the peace agreement was reached, they said that they will you know, not only rehabilitate, but put funding into different communities to make them prosper and that was a part of the deal

B: Yeah. There is an old saying "show me money" and you see what did happen was, some money come, but the people who's job was to divide it had a build in interest. So for instance take roads, take housing, so they would grab some of it, for stuff which we already paid them for through our rates, and taxes. So they used it to build up what they were negligent in. and same with a lot of what they call statutory bodies. And some of it was community dividing. So for instance you would have had, you would have had money coming to generate areas in my town, where they talk about the poor people, people who are unemployed and all the rest of it. Which meant for people who worked all their days, got nothing in our area. So you could go into a working class area where people on benefits live and you would find, I mean I had a councillor as a colleague and I cynically said to him one day when you go out in the morning with your grandchild, spin your child around and ask them which playground they want to go to, would you go an area where people work day and night and there are no play parks? So the more you work the less you got (26:49). And that divide, that supposedly peace giving in the money coming in, it didn't change that. And that created resentment and that's the way it was. And the ex-prisoners, there was lots of money coming in for ex-prisoners but where did it go? Who got it? You tell me, because I don't know. I know jobs were created, I know schemes or scams were created, but very little went to ex-prisoners and their families. And

that's what it was supposed to do. So there was some money came but a lot of it was misdirected. I certainly didn't get any of the benefits of it.

D: You see that's a really big scandal. I heard something similar as well in the tough neighbourhoods of Belfast. You know they were saying that they were going to help those communities, like the Shankill road, and give them money, rehabilitation, good jobs but nothing happened. And then you have just this generation on generation like you mentioned earlier, of people who know they are born to work in what their dad is working and that's their life process.

B: I mean, I was on a union health and safety representative course and there was a lot of Unionists members from different areas, and they openly admitted it. They knew, it's no secret, the same as the police and all the rest of it. We did a job on a police, we did a job in a prison service, we did a job in the civilian searchers. I mean the war was for them was a bustling business, police, vdr, prison service, civilian searchers, security, I mean things were good for them. I mean some of them probably cried when the Troubles were over because once that died their money, their bank keys for their money — you know their additional security costs and all the rest of it. Maybe I'm too cynical.

D: I'm not sure you are. Do you think a state can be run by a working class person?

B: Yeah, it can. But the suits behind it..

D: Yeah, OK we can leave it there. Only a few more questions to go are you happy to continue?

B: Yes.

D: What is solidarity for you and is it practiced in your surroundings?

B: No its not. Solidarity is making everyone equal. And it's not practiced. Some people have risen and gone, people have left and there's no solidarity, there's no picking up the wounded, there's no looking after the less well-off, and I speak from my ex-prisoners community, and there's lots of people with lots of social issues. And they have just been casted, abandoned by people who should know better. People who have lots of money to help them and they didn't.

D: And do you think solidarity is a factor in the production of peace? (30:27)

B: Oh yes, yeah.

D: How does wage labour bring you together or separates you from other workers?

B: The legacy of the conflict is, people like myself who never got training, who never had meaningful jobs, who never had the skills or investment of skills to allow them to come equal with knowledge. So im speaking of Republicans and ex-prisoners who never where allowed to claim or afford an opportunity to catch up. I mean, I came out of prison and I had to educate myself and did, in the skills I need and got qualifications and stuff in the skills that I need. But that was me. There were lots of people who didn't have that drive, or that directions, or that hand holding or sponsorship, so. there were a lot of schemes put together, just to throw money on driving licences forklift drivers, you know unmeaningful stuff. There's some, but take any. but there was no capacity building or any of those things.

D: And do you think then, because you had this drive of learning you know all these skills that you mentioned, do you think it separated you from other workers?

B: No, I didn't have the skills of learning, I was just street wise and maybe lucky. And maybe certain things happen, I met certain people, like I said that fella I met working at a concert, and I built up a work base and I found a niche in what I do. I wasn't more special than anyone else, in fact a lot of the people, or a number of the people I was in prison with were far more better educated than me. They went to grammar school and all the rest of it. And on paper, they should have been able to drive on there.

D: Do you think peace is influenced by employment and working conditions?

B: It can be helped back. I don't know if it's influenced but it can be helped back. I mean when I came out of prison I couldn't get work, if you get a job it lasted for a year. The money was crap but it was better than the benefits. So you got a better way of life for 12 months. Then bang — you were sent down — know it was snakes and ladders. you know so.

D: Do you think the prospect of joining the EU has brought peace to your area?

B: No, it brought better conditions and weights. It brought better funding, but again it was directed in different ways depending on who's in charge of it. So basically you still have a majority on Unionists up to recently, and they grabbed and ran with it to the lovely areas. Very little of it went to certain nationalist areas.

D: So how do you see the Brexit move? How do you think it's going to influence the area?

B: I actually voted for Brexit. Because I thought that the EU had too much to say, I thought that the British government has too much to say in the different things and I thought about it for farmers and fishermen and all the rest of it. It would offer opportunities and better markets for them. So that's how I see it, I don't see the negatives, it's a wee bit like in the millennia when you were told that the whole world was going to crash, computers were all going to break and we'll all go back to your 1 and stuff, and it didn't happen so. Anything is better than what it was.

D: OK, so I have 2 sub questions. You say you only have an Irish passport

B: what do you mean only?

D: Sorry, not only but you never required a British passport, like some people do, you know because of Brexit wouldn't you be considered then as a foreign person living on the land? because you don't have a British passport

B: No I was always considered that. There are a lot of NI people who will consider me foreign by getting an Irish passport. So you have lots of Unionists, and that's a fact, who now have done what they never dreamed they'd never do to get an Irish passport.

D: Yes it's true I saw the stats there and they're unbelievable actually.

B: Clever.

D: Yeah. And the other part of my question was you said with your company you have lots of dealings with the South

B: Yes most of my work is in the South.

D: So do you think being in Brexit is going to influence that then?

B: It will in some way. But it will be what will be. Im in a stage in my life where I can live on a lot less and this situation has shown, I mean part of my work has stopped dead. Because there's no concerts of course, but we're still living.

D: Yeah like all of us, its hard. And do you think that now because of Brexit there's a better chance for a united Ireland?

B: I think technically it probably could be yeah. Its just the way it's going to work yeah. If you are asking me if this is going to be a good idea, from someone who fought and would have given their life freely and risk their life, im not sure. Im not convinced that the politicians, any of them, are there for the good of the people, rather than the party. And I feel that, and that's why I left Sinn Fein. Whenever the party stops to represent the people, and starts to represent the party, its not for the people. It will just take for some people harder and longer to find out.

D: So you know in the Republic Sinn Fein's main advert/promotion for this election was that they were for the people, that they were going to help with housing, with the housing crisis, take people off the streets, you don't believe them?

B: No. I was on the board of the housing, of the housing council, and I was on the board of Northern Ireland housing executive, I didn't see too many of them coming to me whenever I was there in that lonely place, and how can we best get housing built for travellers, or any of those other people, so, it's popular. And that's the down side of when you're in, when you're in government, that's when you see the your money. It's easy to shout when you're in opposition and say you need more housing and you need more jobs, more this and more that, but whenever you are there and you have to create it. And I remember I was sitting in our council and I remember I said to the chief executive, I said how many people pay the rates, you know what the rates are?

D: No.

B: The rates is something people who live in houses pay to people who run the housing — cutting the grass and burying people and emptying the bins and all the rest of it. And dismissively they said everybody pays the rates. I said no, everybody does not pay the rates. I says how many people actually put their hand in their pocket, take out money and pay the rates? He said everybody. I said no, some 27% — all the rest of are sub-set. I says to him so what do we do from the day that those 27% people are off work on holiday? We close all our council facilities. They are open, all the other times, when all the people who don't pay the rates who have to be subsidised, people who are unemployed, and all the rest of it. They are open for them. From the days, when the workers who were actually paid money out of their own pockets, were closed (:40:30). So that's a wee bit the same as the housing and all the rest of it. Lets see, lets see. And then some parties, some other parties talk about industrial wages that there are, Sinn Fein talked about the industrial wages, they wanted it for their NLA's, they wanted it for their MP's, they wanted it for their TD's, but they didn't have it for their council-lors. So where is the equality in some, so it's a sort of equality, so all these ones will get this industrial wage, where people like me who were councils, didn't get it an industrial. So they have different versions of ...so let's see how they deal with that now that they are, let's see how they're building all these houses, I don't know where they are going to get all that money

besides people having to pay more. And with that comes criticism, and a populist party doesn't like criticism. So I don't know how they are gonna marry the two.

D: Fina Gael and Fine Fail made a deal so they excluded Sinn Fein so im not sure we're going to see what they actually planned to do at all.

B: We'll see but time will tell.

D: Yeah. How does European peace relate to internal immigration?

B: It allows some people, to move around. It allows the Elite, and I include myself and all those who have free movement in it, because if up to the grace of god I would be born somewhere like in Syria, and all those other people, who aren't allowed to have what I have, all the opportunities that I have big or small, so it's just a birth right. It's just discrimination by simply were and it's reinforced by union of the "boys and girls" — you know we have this union and unless you're going to do this, you're not coming in. which is very unequal and unfair to certain citizens of the universal world or whatever you want to call them — work on it.

D: And how does peace relate to relations with countries in other continents and immigration from there? And how does the idea of Europe include or exclude? 43:11

B: Well free movement is a good thing and the exchange of work skills and all the rest it. But within that there's a snobbery. You know unless you have X skill or skill this or that, or teachers, or nurses or so people like myself who have none worth talking about. We're excluded. Even though on paper, we're apart of it, but there's exclusion, there's always exclusion.

D: And Im assuming you're saying that about relations with countries from other continents? You know a lot of people were answering this question in context of the refugees and stuff, do you see that being relevant?

B: Again back to the birth thing you know. I mean what right am I to have with beauty that I have, with freedom that I have ? I've no more right than anyone else and yet, there are people who come here with bad intention, but there's lots of people who come here who are decent. Who just want to survive,, who just want to have a lifestyle, who just wanna have the opportunity, that I have had being good or bad. And I think it's criminal and I think it's everything that's wrong to keep those people, just like me, the ex-prisoner thing, we are not allowed in that's it. No discussion of whether their should be a certain amount, were they should have divided up properly and tokenism and all the rest of that. So it's not fair, it's not equal and it's not right. I mean we're dealing with the threat of the corona virus and there's people living in those camps and nobody gives a flying fuck about any of them. The sexual abuse, the neglect and all the those awful, and it just goes on and on but it's not here so who gives a shit. So they have all this nice folksy things but there's "us and them" and that's the way it is.

D: The next question is a bit different. It gets some people by surprise, but how does peace relate to climate change?

B: If you haven't got a government who will sign off the one sheet, which represented the people who have an opinion about that but never have a say, so lots of people have an opinions — I mean at the minute, you can look up into the sky and it's lovely and clear, you see the birds for the first time ever, I mean you sit out at night and you see the birds and you listen to

the cars racing up and down the road. And as well as that the pollution and the dumping and stuff. So if you had peace, peace could relive through that very effectively. If you have people coming from all communities, and not representing people who have a vested interest, so if you have a government who represented people rather than a vested interest, whether it's the industrialists or any of the rest of them. You know there could be real, real good changes.

D: Would you consider peace building a political endeavour? And who is the political subject that can carry it?

B: Well it does need a political assent. It does need political consent. But I think the last people to have do or should be allowed to do peace building is government. It has to come from the people. It has to come from the people who are effected by the conflict. And one of the things that happened in this conflict, and I gained nothing from the Good Friday Agreement, maybe worse — I got punished as a result of it. People who have family members killed, who were horrifically killed in front of them or with them — allowed people out of prison. And that to me, and they didn't say anything, they silently assented to it, and to me that was the single biggest endeavour towards peace by people who were wrong. Doesn't matter whether the family member was a part of a military or was killed by paramilitary, security forces. They just had to go along with it and that was it. I think those people are the heroes of all this. Who simply just bowed their head, and said this is what we have to do. And there was loads of us who took all our personal risks and who paid the price in all the ways and families and I think that's the honest sign of helping people. Had a role to play and connected with it... That was the part that showed it to me how can people get on with their neighbours and who can accept it.

D: Thank you so much Brendan.