

TIME OUT WITH BEA CAMPBELL

Beatrix Campbell

For The Don Dunstan Foundation and The Hawke Centre

Elder Hall, Adelaide University

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Greg Mackie:

Our thanks to the South Australian Trade Union Choir.

My name is Greg Mackie, it is a great privilege for me to be asked tonight to welcome you here. The Hawke Centre and the Don Dunstan Foundation are very proud to jointly present "Time out with Bea Campbell", and I'm delighted to be your chair this evening. Firstly I'd like to make some acknowledgements. Firstly to the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia for their support towards this event. Also to the National Women's Health Conference, Di Jones and others, and to Planning SA, Peter Dungey and the City as a Stage event, for their joint assistance in bringing Bea to Adelaide. We are very lucky to have Bea here for about two weeks which is fantastic and a bit of an opportunity to soak up some Southern Hemisphere summer. I can tell you Bea most of us are well and truly over it and we're looking forward to moving onto autumn. There are some other supporters this evening whose assistance is appreciated, the East End Astoria Apartments who are hosting Bea's stay here, a little bookshop down in the West End called Imprints, Booze Brothers and Nippy's Natural Fruit Juices who will be providing some refreshments afterwards that I will invite you all to join us in.

Also of course, most importantly I would like to make a comment about the Don Dunstan Foundation and the Hawke Centre. If you actually look at the creeds written on their banners here, I think I actually need to say very little. What a wonderful collection of aspirations and what a wonderful statement and assertion of our desires for a better society. The fact that this evening's presentation takes the form of a collaboration between these two organisations is also no mere accident. I think it's no surprise to find that two organisations that find their roots somewhat to the left of centre of politics are the two socially active and engaged organisations committed to promoting public discourse

and expanding the role of thinking within the public domain. Collaboration in a city like Adelaide is the only way to go, the outcomes invariably are greater than the sum of the parts and for a small surrendering of sovereignty it is quite possible for organisations to achieve great things. I welcome and encourage and express my gratitude to both organisations.

A couple of years ago 6500 people turned up to the entertainment centre to hear Don Dunstan deliver a message in favour of the role of public intervention to ensure public good. And it's no accident that both organisations have included in their missions the promotion of public dialogue. I'd like to acknowledge and congratulate Michelle White from the Don Dunstan Foundation and Elizabeth Ho from the Hawke Centre and their people for their part for making this evening's gathering possible.

Now, what to say about Bea Campbell to an audience for whom no introduction is necessary? There are many people here who probably go to bed with Bea Campbell on a weekly basis. It's not my line, it's a line which has been used many times, but it always puts a smile on my face and I'd have to say that Bea is one of the most popular regular commentators on Late Night Live with Phillip Adams on Radio National. Long live the ABC. If you were to ask yourself why is Bea Campbell is so popular here amongst a thinking public, it's not only a factor of the significant Anglo/Irish-Celtic population that comprises a significant part of our population. Bea is also listened to because of the ideas, philosophy, politics and values contained in what she has to say, what's more you don't always have to agree with her, however, I will say that it helps.

Bea's career in journalism and writing spans four decades now and we've seen her work published in papers and journals far too numerous to list here tonight, but which include the *Guardian*, the *Times*, the *Observer* and the *New Statesman*. Bea was also a founding member of women's liberation journal *Red Rag* which was launched in 1971 and of the theoretical journal, *Politics and Power*. In the 1980s Bea wrote and produced several documentaries including *I shot my husband and no one asked me why*. It's a great title. As well as works on the Nottingham child abuse controversy and Sein Fein in Northern Ireland and gender and computers. There are several books to Bea's credit including in 1984 , *Wigan Pier Revisited* which remains one of the Virago Press's 10 best selling books of all time and won the Cheltenham Literature Festival Prize. *The Iron Ladies*, about why women voted Tory was published in 1987 and more recently, amongst others, *Diana, Princess of Wales: how sexual politics shook the monarchy*.

In this busy career, Bea has been honoured with several honorary Doctors of Letters as well as awards for journalism and documentaries and has been a keynote speaker at many gatherings around the world. Throughout Bea's career, and contained within everything she has produced, her commitment to social justice and equity issues has shone through. The effects of poverty, power, powerlessness and pleasure have been themes which recur in her work. Last Saturday afternoon Bea arrived in Adelaide and shortly after arriving gave me a call on my mobile, I was at Womadelaide and we arranged to rendezvous a little later in the afternoon. My partner Jonathon and I had a chance to have a sit and a gin in a cool room before we wandered down to the warmth of Botanic Park and within seconds this woman, who had been 24-30 hours in flight and in airport lounges, engaged vigorously, spiritedly and in a very sharing kind of way in a great conversation between the three of us - it got into a bit of a good old rant. It was a great thing to think that somebody can still have such fire after such a long flight. It was a great afternoon and a great evening.

I first met Bea at the Festival of Ideas in 1999 and I'm absolutely delighted to have the opportunity to welcome her this afternoon. Ladies and gentlemen, without any further ado, please welcome Beatrix Campbell.

Beatrix Campbell:

Hello, I have to say that Australia and Australians are the warmest people and place I ever get to, and thank you to you and thank you for being here and thank you for having me here. I want to say something before I get on with my speech. I was just remembering once I had got around this university and North Terrace space, I was reminded of the first time that I was here and it was for the Intergalactic Women's Conference that the Australian Women's Movement organised. I asked a pal of mine who was involved in the organisation if she knew anybody who was involved with the Hindmarsh Island women because I'd like to meet them and I'd like to write a story about it. And I have to say it is a chilling thing to be back in this space with those women being threatened and menaced and mocked and derided again still as we speak. Anyway I say it to them, they are of course indefatigable, nothing will be as bad as what they've already had to endure. I have to say to them 'thank you' for the kind of enlightenment that you gave to me in the course of doing that work which changed the way that I understood all sorts of things, not the least, this place.

I want to talk for a while now about a theme that's to do with how we think about civil society and how we think about peace and I want to think about that in the context of two discourses. One is the way in which civil society is being imagined both by those who would adhere to a kind of neo-liberal politics but also by those in the world of social democracy or left-of-centre politics, or rather the right-wing bit of left-of-centre politics, are at the moment thinking about civil society as well, and I think traducing the complications of civil society. I want to anchor some of those thoughts in some thoughts also about the Northern Ireland peace process because something has been produced in the Northern Ireland agreement, apart from the agreement itself which is a fascinating and, I think, beautiful document, but also in the parallel peace processes that produced not only the end to the war in Northern Ireland but also the promise of a new kind of peace in that place. It's that bit that is rarely addressed and it's that bit that is, really, really, I promise you, absolutely riveting, and in a sense is the kind of environment that helps us think critically about what on earth we're on about when we talk about civil society.

The first thing then I want to say is that this notion which has been around increasingly over the last three decades and attempts to describe that space that is not the space of the state, it is the space that we all inhabit and often invokes this sense of civil society or community as a space that is without conflict and without pain and without aggravation. Indeed, increasingly, it seems to me that it is a concept that is invoked in order to erase a sense that of course society is full of conflict, power, powerlessness and dangerousness. It is a concept which has more comfortably come to be assimilated within political discourse since the collapse of the communist states and with the emergence of new forms of social democratic discourse that are trying to survive the problem of the bequest, if you like, of the communist states on the one hand with its devastating consequences for the meaning of socialism in practice, but also in their efforts to invent some new kind of notion or idea of social democracy.

In Britain it's something which is used, oddly, by New Labour—New Labour I don't know whether it exists anymore, the 'new' I think is a term which has just been dripping off the edge and I don't know whether New Labour likes to call itself New Labour anymore for reasons you're all familiar with. But in any case one of the things that is often dragged into this notion of civil society is exemplified in the way that New Labour has tended to think it. And it is in this, what I call, 'new holy trinity' a place and a series of connections without conflict, without the problem of power that is cited in these things called family,

community and nation. The assumption is, and my leader, the *beau* Blair, is someone for whom these terms are seamless and equivalent and for whom the notion of nationhood and community derives from the notion of family. Well we could say—I was going to say that we won't, but we will—we could say that we don't know what kind of family he comes from but the kind of families I know, and it includes the best of them, of course are all fissured by something called conflict, difference, differential interests. And if they're successful then they mediate those interests well and those differences well, and if they're not successful then of course they're dangerous places.

That's why I want to talk about Northern Ireland because it's a place that challenges the blithe way in which these terms are invoked in political discourse. Because of course the assumption is that Northern Ireland is a place full of families because tribes are of course family based, they emerge from families. It's full of communities who challenge absolutely the soft-centred way that we often think about this thing called community. Indeed the whole point seems to me that the drift in the way in which neo-liberal thinking and some social democratic thinking appropriates the notion that civil society is deeply authoritarian, it is designed to erase the problem of power. And as we'll see it is often designed to erase the difficulty of difference and dissent and that's the sense in which, in terms of its political performance, its way of going about being political, is profoundly authoritarian.

Certainly our experience in Britain at the moment, is that. You know my country has just gone to war, apparently— missed it actually because I was on my way here—but there was no conversation in the House of Commons about whether we should or shouldn't go to war. Absolutely astonishing. A country goes to war and its Prime Minister doesn't need to seek the mandate of its elected representatives because, of course, the assumption is a) it's too difficult to do that, but more importantly, that he personifies the people. Now he does that in what would be a kind of smiling way, you know he doesn't despatch the people to Siberia in the name of the people and the party and all of that—anyway that's going down another pointless direction.

Anyway, here we have exemplified the ways in which at the core of this project there is something very problematic about the problem of power. As I was saying to the Women's Health Conference, this is expressed now in the notion of the Third Way which is something that everyone in Britain is very familiar with even though none of us really know what it means. It is endlessly invoked as an account of what our government is improvising in

contemporary politics and the effectiveness of this term is precisely in its emptiness. The condition of the term is that nobody knows what it means. But what if for sure does, in its emptiness, is give us a kind of political language that dispenses with something we've all been very familiar with, which is that politics is about how you manage and administer and order the necessary thing at the centre of politics which is conflict and difference and differential holdings in terms of power. And this again is all expressed in a sense that what's involved here is the discovery of a new kind of radical centrism, at the core of which is an effort to renounce the problem of power. And thus, of course, not face the problem of power wherever it resides, whether it's in a family, or whether it's in government institutions and houses of Parliament. Here the work of someone I think some of you are familiar with, Chantal Mouffe, is very interesting because what she has identified is of course what that means is a commitment to erase the adversary and to assume that there are none and that we all share the same interests. That all of you and Rupert Murdoch share the same interests, so that the women who have laid claim to the memory and meaning of Hindmarsh Island are the same as Mr Howard, that's what that kind of project seeks, I think, to achieve.

So it erases first of all the problem of power and also what we've discovered in our own time, all of us have participated in discovering and naming the proliferation of sites of power which live in families, and communities and regions and races and in ideas, and we've all been involved in the creation of enormously diverse claims in political life. Claims that insist on our difference, however small they are, and the particular thing that we need to assert about ourselves. Things which have historically been regarded as not important, but they're so not important that people have been driven to pass laws to make sure that they don't happen. And I think that sexual orientation is a very good example of something which is regarded as absolutely trivial, "why do we go on about it all the time"? But the people who in the same moment say that, are the people who passed laws to make sure that there weren't things called sexual orientations. What's involved partly is this thing that I've repeated myself many times trying to reiterate is—the problem of power. What, in order to achieve that, it has to do is invoke some other set of shared values that explains what binds us. And here Chantal Mouffe is very interesting and useful again, I think, because what she's tried to describe is the way in which the notion of consensus assumes kind of religious proportions. It is invoked as if it were some kind of mystical property, she calls it the 'sacrolisation' of consensus. What of course that relies upon seamlessly is these categories that are invoked by the holy trinity that I mentioned earlier on, you know that society is rooted in something called 'the family, and community and

nation', and they, of course, are all a good thing. Thus politics becomes a moral pseudo religious project, rather than a project that's secular essentially, but is also designed to deal peacefully with the consequences of the problem of power. And that democracy is nothing if it's not about the navigation and the negotiation of different kinds of power and different properties held by different powers.

So instead of politics being about the management of conflict, politics becomes this kind of moral and virtuous endeavour. The difficulty with it of course is that this creates a politics emptied of politics. A kind of democracy that is actually expressed as a democratic deficit. The thing I mentioned earlier being a very good example of it, my country can go to war and consult nobody about whether it wants to. So there is horrible kind of authoritarianism and despatching of dissent and annihilation of political conversation that's involved here.

Now we get to Northern Ireland. That's why Northern Ireland is so completely interesting. It's absolutely tiny, it's on the edge of somewhere, even though that very tiny island has yielded marvellous people all over the world - sometimes they didn't always behave very marvellously - but one of the best things they ever did was to create some of the most marvellous music, one among the many things they do very well, one of the things they do marvellously. Anyway there's this titchy place—1.5 million people in Northern Ireland which has produced one of the most brutalised and horrible, actually, political cultures for its people, that the people have had to endure, that is routinely traduced in the way that is represented, particularly by the English. The English have exported these versions of events all over the world in ways that mean that it's very difficult if you don't live there to understand what on earth that conflict was all about. It's routinely represented as a conflict between two sets of bigots, both of them horrible, one of them pious, the other murderous. That way of representing it of course means that none of us would really understand what on earth would possess the bigots and the militarists on either side to endure with a terrible, and again what is represented as a holy, war for 30 years. A conflict which in its English representation of it becomes something really which just concerns these spectres, it's all really just about good and evil and the good people are, essentially in Northern Ireland, the people not involved in politics at all. They're just the people who want peace. And the 'baddies', and the worst 'baddies' of all, are always represented as the evil murdering bastards who are in the IRA.

Now funnily enough, these murdering bastards and many others have, out of this most brutalised and very, very conservative, pinched in its conservatism, growling, gloomy conservatism, happened to have harvested this extraordinary, creative document—the Agreement. It's a funny thing, it's only called the Agreement and the people in Northern Ireland keep on worrying now that the world has moved on do they have to add other terms to it like, the Good Friday Agreement or the Belfast Agreement or whatever. Anyway the actual document is the Agreement and the thing that is so clever about this Agreement is that is precisely anchored in a recognition that that place was terrible, and the thing that that made it terrible wasn't just that these mad Paddies went to war and drank a lot, and therefore went to more war, but that this was rooted in something very real. It was rooted in an unequal distribution of resources and an unequal distribution of respect. Those words actually in a sense, they're wonderful words, but they do slightly minimise the tone of the difficulty that the people in Northern Ireland have had to live with.

I'll never forget having a conversation, it wasn't a conversation at all, it was an interview, I was interviewing, doing my job, which means clutching the pen, concentrating on the piece of paper and the words that are being said by this person who is now the Minister who is responsible for equality in the new Northern Ireland Assembly and who was the equality spokesperson for the Ulster Unionist Party. He's a lawyer and I remember being in this room and we're having this conversation and he's doing his job and I'm doing my job, and unconsciously I suddenly became aware that my pen had stopped and my jaw had probably hit the deck. I was arrested by the thought, this is the year, I don't know when it was, '*fin de siècle* Northern Ireland' was where I was, anyway I was near the end of the century and I heard from the mouth of a man stuff that I thought no person who wanted to be regarded as a respectable member of society would ever dream of uttering. I could not believe it. He was absolutely confident that the thing that he believed about Catholics, because that's what he was talking about, was normal. What he actually believed, well I don't really know what he believed, I know what he felt because what he believed didn't entirely cohere, but what he felt was a visceral sense of disgust which was rooted in the way in which I think he perceived the problem of Catholics in the body of a woman. Unsurprisingly because that's a religion that invokes the body of the woman all the time, however, not in quite the way that he was. And it won't surprise you because you hear this stuff about other ethnicities, nationalities and racial groups all the time, but the thing that he thought was problematic about Catholics - and thus led to his community being misrepresented and blamed for inequality and discrimination which was of course the thing that caused the conflict in Northern Ireland in the first place - what he

wanted to persuade me of, was that the problem really wasn't about discrimination, Catholics not getting jobs. The problem was breeding. And he, well I won't go on about it because you can imagine the tone of the conversation. The problem of Northern Ireland was all these Catholic mothers breeding at such a velocity that the place was overwhelmed. The fact of course that Catholics still constituted a minority in Northern Ireland appeared to escape him. So you had a sense of these feral Catholic baby popes, no that's the wrong image actually because of course they wouldn't be being feral or reproducing, but that the spectre haunting his society was this endless, infinite production of Catholics.

We jest, but the importance of that was that he wasn't lying, and in a sense he had the courage, or the confidence or the madness, to say what he really believed and felt which was that problem there was this other lot of people who he basically could not abide. Unsurprisingly because his religion and his political culture was all about his entitlement to have occupied that place without let or hindrance because it was full of people who were a disgrace. Catholics. And something of that feeling has gone on infusing the dominant party which enjoyed majority rule, unchallenged rule until the eruption of the so-called troubles in the late 60s.

One of the things that are now I want to suggest is that part of the problem, that was the problem as it happens, but one of the other things that's difficult about the way in which the community conflict in Northern Ireland has been represented is first of all the thing that you're familiar with, which is to assume that all of this is just the madness of the Irish and that there's something tribal about this. And thus that the people who are the 'goodies' in the situation are the people who eschew alignment to either position, who don't commit themselves to politics with a big 'P'. If you remember there is a very good exemplar of this when there was two women who emerged, as it were, from the sea of civil society and became, do you remember them, the 'peace people'. The great thing about these 'peace people' was that they were against war—which was completely convenient. So they were celebrated because they were against war and because they represented the little people and actually they were given the Nobel Peace Prize. But the problem was that kind of peace person doesn't connect with the causes of the war, doesn't take a position in relation to the causes of the war. So the way in which in Northern Ireland peaceful people were viewed and respected was that they necessarily disconnected from that place's difficulties and thus took no responsibility for it and the resolution of that place's difficulties.

Now I want to talk now about the substance of Northern Ireland's challenge to that thing that I mentioned at the beginning, this new way of representing civil society. Because in order to produce peace Northern Ireland had to come up with more than 'peace people'. It had to create a political culture that was so expanded that it could embrace a number of political actors who had historically been excluded from politics in that place. So there were several parallel peace processes happening at the time when the bit you'll all be familiar with. This is the time when John Major, who had a not dishonourable place in the story of the creation of peace in Northern Ireland actually—certainly not dishonourable given the party that he came from which had little respect either for the Unionists upon whom the Conservative (and Unionist) Party in London relied upon because their majority was so slight, but also because they were profoundly estranged from the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland. So John Major to some degree rose above that culture and was an important agent in the story. But anyway the point is that you'll all be familiar with the dealings that were going on in the early 90s between Washington, Dublin and London to move towards some way of ending the war and involving themselves in secret negotiations with the people they thought were the warriors. The only warriors that they had to bother about who were of course the IRA. But there were parallel peace processes shadowing that development which were terribly important and are usually not acknowledged or affirmed. Amongst them we find this proliferation of actors who are now embraced in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Now the first thing that's important about that is that there were many parallel peace processes. One of them involved for sure those people who had themselves been combatants who had taken up the gun and who had killed somebody, and who had ended up in prison. And the prisons that were often represented in the late 90s as these radioactive places full of radioactive people who, if we opened the doors and let them out, then my God, Northern Ireland would be back at war. Without an acknowledgement that the war could not be ended without the people in the prisons, without those combatants who had, after all, taken their position to its ultimate. But more interestingly than that, the prisons were full of these people who, once they were inside, did something very remarkable. They had a think, they became scholars, they read books. I tell you the prisoners in the Maze, almost exclusively men of course, those men who have emerged from the prisons who are now in their middle years, in their 40s many of them, who had taken up the gun when they were 17 or 19 and because they were boys wanted to be warriors, wanted to kill somebody because that's what many boys apparently like doing.

But these blokes did something which other men of their generation, regarded as much more respectable, didn't have to do—read, think, take care of somebody, another man, maybe a broken man that they were having to share a cell with. And because they went on courses, organised by the Open University, distance learning courses, many of these men ended up being more, if you like, typical of our image of what a Renaissance Man is than many of the men who would have regarded these people as absolutely disgraceful.

To be absolutely precise the thing that is remarkable about that constituency of men is that, even though they were exiled from the everyday life of their own generation, a generation that has lived its adult life for the last 30 years like people like us, these were men who read everything they could lay their hands on what their own generation was producing. And consequently for hard men and men deemed very dangerous, one of the remarkable things about them is that they are more influenced by the ideas of feminism than the men who never actually had to go to prison. Who wouldn't have read a feminist book if they could possibly help it. Whose houses may be full of them because the women they live with read them but they don't expect to have to do the same thing—do they? I know you all do, but certainly the men who judge these men would of course never do. I'm thinking in particular of a man called Gerry Kelly who was regarded as a master bomber. It was he who bombed the Old Bailey, he did this when he was 19 and is now part of the government in Northern Ireland. When I was asking him about what he read, what like to read, he went through the novels that were his favourite novels. One of them, I thought terribly affectingly, was Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*. That was his favourite novel. I mention that because these men did actually, I think, deserve our respect because they've done something important—they changed. Then they took responsibility for their own history and then they took responsibility for their own country.

So one of the parallel peace processes that was going on was, crucially, to engage these men in the kind of settlement that would be liveable with for them. And if it was liveable with for them, then it would be for the most dispossessed communities in Northern Ireland because it was the dispossessed communities that harvested the young men who went to war. And if nothing was going to change for the most dispossessed then there would have been no peace.

Then that takes us to the other part of the peace process that really concerned people who of course didn't go to war, that kind of war, but who had been involved really since the mid-80s in an attempt to find an instrument that would deal with the historic inequity

that described the relationship between Protestants and Catholics and, of course, many other categories in Northern Ireland. Initially this was expressed as an attempt to find some way of regulating that economy, disciplining that economy so that it wouldn't discriminate against Catholics. And partly in response to that pressure the British Government began to introduce or to concede instruments, bureaucratic devices, which I won't bore you with because they are fantastically technical, but for those who love them they are lovely, things of beauty. And it has turned out that these things of bureaucratic beauty have found their way in the Northern Ireland Agreement and, indeed, constitute that part of the Northern Ireland Agreement that will really make the difference, that will demand that something changes.

This was something that finally in the 1990's became expressed in what is now called the Equality Coalition which is an alliance constructed by the major public sector union—Unison as it's called—a union largely full of full and part-time Protestant and Catholic workers working in the public sector, and the Campaign for the Administration of Justice which is the major human rights organisation in Northern Ireland. So it was a very interesting convergence between these two agencies that were interested in social and economic justice, and particularly interesting because the energy for this thing came from a Union, unlike many of the other unions historically in Northern Ireland which, because they represented people in employment, tended to represent Protestants. So the Trade Union movement has never been entirely clean in its relationship to the struggle in Northern Ireland. But Unison uniquely represented both communities and what they then guaranteed be inscribed in the Northern Ireland Agreement were the terms and conditions, if you like the new terms of engagement, not just between Protestants and Catholics, that would describe what was going to have to happen in that economy in order that Catholics would have their proper place in it.

But it did something else, very very important and completely challenging, particularly for my government which has always behaved in Northern Ireland as if Northern Ireland was nothing to do with us, as if we Brits were nothing to do with the problem, as if we were nothing but an honest broker. The thing that, I won't bore you with the technical details but they are worth visiting, the thing that's very important about it is that in the equality section, the discipline that is described is the following. First of all that public authorities have a duty to promote and practice equality and that their processes and what they do, and the way they go about their business will be monitored by the affected constituencies. And that those affected constituencies have the right to be and the

government has the duty to enlist them in a process of participation that will scrutinise all public authorities on just about anything. So if it's about the location of public toilets or a hospital or an economic strategy or whatever it is, their practises all have to be judged in terms of their impact on the affected constituencies. And it's not just something which is 'we are a nice equal opportunities, public authority and we've written down at the bottom of our document along with the logo' and everybody thinks 'that's nice' and that's the end of it. There is a whole series of dynamic processes described here that constitute all of these bodies in a new relationship to each other. The beauty of it is it doesn't just concern Protestants and Catholics and bosses because in order to produce the peace in the first place, what had to be created was a new context for politics in Northern Ireland. One that would forever end the possibility of majoritarian tyranny, which had been enjoyed by the Unionists forever, for as long as that place existed. Thus what they had to do was to expand the space of politics rather than reduce it and expand the actors who could engage in it.

So all the constituencies to the Northern Ireland Assembly are represented by six members and that means that a titchy party like the Women's Coalition had a chance of being elected. It also meant that the parties who have had an awful time on the Unionist side asserting the differences of interests between different categories of Protestants could find their place in the political sun. So for example the parties who are closest to the Loyalist combatants, the Loyalists being the hard face of Unionism, the militarised face of Unionism and who also represent the most dispossessed Protestant communities, these were also parties that were able to engage in the electoral process and seek election. And one of them very successfully did, and indeed is a party that associated with the challenge to the culture of what we call 'big house Unionism'. In other words, the culture that has emanated from the elite elements of the culture of Unionism which assumes that those who are in the baronial big house speak for their servants. Of course it's that culture of 'big house Unionism' that really prohibited the assertion of difference within Unionism itself. So there had been a proliferation of voices in Northern Ireland, the proliferation of which was necessary to the production of the peace.

It looks like something very interesting is going to happen there. Not least because the government itself is engaged in this process, not as a kind of patrician brokering, but as another subject, another actor that is also going to be required to change. Can you imagine what that feels like? To the Northern Ireland Office which is the redoubt of Westminster that has managed Northern Ireland during a 30 year war, with all of its secrets

which its determinedly not sharing. Imagine what it feels like to people who managed that place without the let or hindrances that happen when you have something called democracy. Imagine what it feels like. They've got all these people clamouring in a room like this and I tell you I've been in rooms like this in Northern Ireland that are full of people who are Loyalist former gunmen sitting next door to a person who's in a gay organisation, who's never been in a room and that's had that many people in it, who thinks that he's entitled or she's entitled to be there, and entitled to be consulted. We are talking about the most conservative culture in the British Isles. And so for the first time because the different grounds for people's interest were specified in the last moments when the Agreement was being negotiated, in the last 36 hours. Imagine it, you've got parliament buildings, everybody's exhausted, they've been at it for days and days, they've taken their shoes off, people are rushing out for sandwiches, they haven't had any sleep and I imagine a few were popping a few pills, and there are these scribes from the civil service scampering around all these different delegations saying, "can you live with it, can you live with this?"

Imagine what it's like for David Trimble's negotiating team to be asked by the Progressive Unionist Party which is a little Loyalist party close to combatants and Sein Fein and the Women's Coalition, "can you live with this list?". And the list goes like this, the grounds on which the constituencies have to be consulted involve religion, ethnicity (there is a very small but very present Chinese community and travelling community in Northern Ireland), that they want discrimination on the grounds of domestic circumstances to be added to this list, gender to be added to this list, age to be added to this list, physical ability to be added to this list and sexual orientation to be added to this list. And there's David Trimble thinking "I can live with gay people, and disabled people and ... women", probably they're the ones who are most uncomfortable of all for him to have to live with. So in that moment of crisis for them, were they going to make the deadline? These people from the most beleaguered and if you like, ugly, political culture came up with something more elastic and expanded and democratic than anybody could have imagined. Something that was, in turn, not just going to discipline them, but was going to discipline their government itself.

I will end now with one final sentence. That all of that is lovely - and despite the difficulties of the place, despite the endless arguments about decommissioning and policing and all of that stuff, I am sure and, I think that they are sure, that this agreement will survive because it is a very beautiful thing. There is, however, one element in it which is in big, big

trouble. And that is the human rights and policing element which my government and indeed the Unionist majority in Northern Ireland are feeling very, very reluctant to giving in on. And one of the reasons why, and I'll end with this very brief story, is because the kinds of practises that would have to come under scrutiny, that would have to be controlled and would have to be unearthed from the vaults of Stormont and have their story told are of course secrets that are absolutely to do with the heavy end of enforcing the thing that created the problem in the first place. Exemplified by the kind of thing you will be familiar with, the death of a person like Rosemary Nelson. And if you don't know about Rosemary Nelson, I'll just suggest that you might want to think about her. She was the human rights lawyer who was murdered, after the Agreement had been signed, by a group known as the Red Hand Defenders which is a kind of flag of convenience for a loose coalition of Loyalist paramilitaries. The chilling thing about the death of Rosemary Nelson was this, my government knew that she was at risk. They had been told at the highest level that she was at risk, they were given evidence months before she was murdered that she was at risk. But my government didn't think that her life was worth saving. So it didn't. So she's dead. And we're never going to be told why. Actually we will because these things have an awful habit of leaking, of just staying there in the ground and in the end Rosemary Nelson's story, or rather not her story but the story of the people who a) killed her and b) wanted her to be killed—it will come out. But you might just want to think about it. When we get to March, the middle of March will be the anniversary of her murder, and just have at the back of your head that if the British Government reaches a point where it can contemplate the story of her killing being told, then you know something really, really big has happened. Something will really have changed. Thank you for listening.

Question 1

Thank you for that talk. I very much appreciated and learnt a lot from it. I acknowledge the point that you make that new nations, new cultures and new societies are often based and stand upon the shoulders of heroes, soldiers, indeed assassins, and history tells us that there are many nations in Africa whether they are Libya or Zimbabwe, that there are many countries in the Middle East where previous freedom fighters have become the people who've become the leaders of new nations. I suppose the same happened in various parts of Europe. What is it in your view, if anything, that distinguishes this process of going from hostility and conflict, in Northern Ireland from similar processes of nation building that have occurred elsewhere?

Bea Campbell:

Well the short answer is that I don't really know, but I'll have a little think with you for a moment. I suppose the thing that makes the people in Northern Ireland feel absolutely confident that they will have a peace and that it will endure is because the conditions of their democracy have been described in absolutely minute detail. The place has, after all, been run by the 'big house' for an awful long time so they know all about 'big house' stuff and they know what it left them with. They know that it didn't sort stuff out, and also ultimately that 'big house' politics bequeathed by colonial powers aren't very skilled at the creation of democracies. So what Northern Ireland had to discover for itself is the final imperative which is if you don't describe in detail everybody's entitlement to participate in this democracy and then you create the structures which will discipline it, then you don't get it.

British colonialism is extremely skilled, as you know, at leaving places with the most awful mess to deal with, and putting its people in charge in the hope that they will continue to manage it. Well they did that very well in Northern Ireland, well they did it very horribly actually but it was very successful for a long time in Northern Ireland. The thing that is beautiful about the Agreement is that the deal that is struck, as I was trying to explain, is one that empowers civil society and connects civil society as a disciplining arena to the practice of governance and that's the crucial thing. And in order to do that it had to expand the identities and issues that were going to be present in the practice of politics. It couldn't be left to one party. They knew all about what that meant, one party dominance was disastrous in Northern Ireland, as it has been everywhere it has been practised as it happens, in whoever's name. So that's the clever thing that, I think, they've come up with. Also these are people who, remember, know all about war and they know all about dangerousness, and it's not just that they're tired of it, but that they decided not to do it anymore. They decided to do something different and that in turn was part of particularly the Paramilitary organisations' conversations with their own constituencies. And, it must be said, absolutely crucially their own conversations with the women in their own constituencies who as ever are the people who largely energise civil society with their imagination and energy.

So there are many, many stories to be told in all of this. But what that has produced in that place is an extraordinary literate and sophisticated political culture. Not that that sophistication is very often heard in the language of its leaders but it's certainly heard and felt in the feelings and imagination of the people who just happen to live there. Who've

had an awful lot to put up with, who are very smart, who created that Agreement, they wrote it, they believe in it, they voted for it, they knew what they were voting for. So they all now feel they are the owners of something that is completely complicated and completely interesting. Now I don't know that that same thing happened to other, certainly probably Africa, places where the Brits left, and left them with a mess and left them with their agents very often in charge on the assumption that the people couldn't do any better. Always a terrible mistake. That's the end of that answer. Will it do for the moment?

Question 2

Earlier when you were talking you spoke about the neo-liberal appropriation of the notion of civil society and I'm wondering in a way looking at the Australian context whether you would see that this appropriation has been served in a sense to rationalise the retreat of the state from a legitimate role in achieving social and equitable outcomes. In our situation here, for example, the Federal government dismantled the Commonwealth Employment Service, which whilst everyone would concede there was scope for improvement and development, and handed it over to predominantly church-based, non-government organisations. Is this the kind of appropriation you're talking about and seeing in the British situation?

Bea Campbell

A clever question. I think that is exactly what is at stake. That there's a feeling in some of those Social Democratic or Labour Parties, I mean you'd expect it from those parties that adhere to neo-liberal ideologies about the state and the economy and the individual and all of that stuff, but I think amongst Social Democratic parties that have been mesmerised by the triumph and the élan of neo-liberalism in the 80s and 90s, and this has certainly happened in Britain and I have a sense of it happening here as well. That these are parties which in some sense are bereft of an idea and a lot of this vacuous stuff that I was talking about, you know stands as apparently an idea, and indeed it is claimed as a big idea, but one of the things that shadows that big idea is a real difficulty with defending the idea of the state. It's very interesting to think for those of us who live in Europe, of the difference between British Labourism in its current incarnation and other European social democracies which often have a much more confident civil libertarian dimension to them because some of them are not Labour Parties, they are Social Democratic Parties which is

I know isn't an enormous difference but there's an ocean in that nuance of difference. But also because in Europe there is a much more confident, in their Social Democratic parties, feeling about the state and what the state properly does, and what the nature of the people's argument with and stake in the state should be. Exemplified for those of us who travel across the channel between Britain and the rest of Europe in what happens when you get on a train in London and it takes you to the Chunnel at a speed of approximately 3 miles a hour. So it kind of 'shuggles' along and it huffs and puffs on these scabby old railway lines, half of which are broken and you're sitting there in this thing that feels like a limousine, you know it should fly, and we chug along and we hit the Chunnel, and then we're in France and you do fly and their trains go at a million miles a minute. And the reason is because they have a state that believes in the state and they believe in the state's purpose which is to sort out the infrastructure, and the means by which we're all educated and how we all get from a to b. And you'd think it was simple and obvious and also that the duty of this state is to guarantee peace between persons. Well we have a government now that increasingly, I think, doesn't believe that it the job of the state to guarantee peace between persons and justice for persons, particularly I might tell you if you're a child in which case it's the job of the parent to keep the child in a state of permanent peace and inertia—preferably sequestered inside its own house, not on the streets causing aggravation to adults and other children which is a very strange thing for those of a certain generation who grew up on the street and it was a very safe space because it was full of other children as it happens as against adults and cars.

But anyway, we've got a kind of political ideology which believes in shedding the state because it's embarrassed about the kinds of difficulties that inefficient social democratic states left us with, which of course left us terribly disappointed, which is why Thatcherism got elected in the first place. It traded on people's disappointment, so instead of learning from the disappointment and producing clever states that do things well and democratically and deliver social justice and social equity, there's a retreat from the state as the means by which a society can be well organised. It's a very long way of saying yes you are right.

Question 3:

That leads me perfectly into the concept of globalism which I think as the new religion is as terrifying as you could get. I think we're going to find our democracy so threatened and ourselves so powerless as we lose our governments to this amazing sort of esoteric ephemeral concept of globalism. And I'm just wondering how we can apply some sort of

strengthening to ourselves, to find the courage to say lets look at ourselves, lets assert ourselves. What would you say, how do we stop this leakage of power in our society outwards, so that even our governments are powerless against it?

Bea Campbell:

Actually I seem to remember a similar conversation about globalisation the last time I was here in Australia. I don't know what to add really more than what you've said. I'm mindful of a piece written by an economic journalist, an interesting left-of-centre economic journalist called Will Hutton in Britain, in response to a White Paper, a government paper that is, that had been produced by Clare Short who is one of the few strong women who is allowed to be in the new Labour cabinet. She was assigned international development because everybody, I think, assumed she would never be in the country and therefore would never cause any trouble. And she's done this paper on globalisation which there's quite an intense argument about because she's partly saying this is a very good thing because a) it's inevitable, but also it's a good thing because it creates the conditions in which international standards can be agreed and established. It creates the conditions in which we all participate in the most potent bits of the world's economy. And he said fine, great all of this is true, but there is one problem in this and it is one word - capitalism.

Question 3 (continued):

One of the most frightening concepts is that we see our government unable to make decisions any longer for us, to help us to keep our power here. It seems to me that we're perhaps on the bottom of rung of where Ireland has put itself at the top.

Bea Campbell:

Well isn't this the point then. We're faced with a real crisis. We are faced with a crisis of our international institutions. That crisis is felt certainly now acutely because of the proliferation of wars across the planet that cannot be managed by international institutions. A real sense of bewilderment about when international institutions should be mandated to intervene in other nations. We are living at a time of transition in which the status of the nation state and its rights and its resources and its relationship to international governance is a right mess. So how you then deal with something that is more diffuse and is extraordinarily resourceful as the kind of institutions that are driving globalisation is yet another story. So clearly, on the long term, one of the things that needs to be addressed is what exactly the limits of the nation state are, what the limits of nation state sovereignty amount to and what the duties and powers of international institutions will be, and is an

ethic of social and economic justice ever to guide those international institutions. A very difficult thing to pull off given that it doesn't entirely describe the duties of those nation states anyway in relation to their own peoples.

So I think that we are the generation, the people on this planet who are going to live with a really dramatic transformation in the relationships between states and between economies and people who live in them. And we clearly don't have access to institutions internationally that will be guided by standards that would ever want to discipline capitalist globalisation and that is problem. The rich countries in the world absolutely do not want to do that and they won't even bank roll the United Nations which is supposed to be there to keep peace after all. So they're certainly not going to do something that's going to constrain economic movements across state boundaries. But that clearly is the project, what I've said is the obvious and what now all of us have find how to do that. Don't we?

Question 4:

I was interested with the Agreement you talked about it as encompassing the different groupings and acknowledging the differences of people within that society, and that it put forward mechanisms to keep those groups engaged in the process of governance. Have you seen any infection heading over the waters there to where you live or any signs of activism to try to get that participation in governance happening?

Bea Campbell:

That's a really interesting question because one of the reasons why those of us who are interested in this really want to talk about the Northern Ireland Agreement is because this is something which has the status of something like a constitution in that country. And it's very, very rare, certainly in England, not so true in Scotland or Wales probably, but certainly true in England - it's very, very rare that any of those elements, the human rights and equality elements of the Agreement get any kind of air time in England for two reasons. One because the way in which the war has been represented is, as I said, as something that's got nothing to do with any of us, it's just about mad people or bigoted people or people with guns, but also because precisely of the problem of what they call 'read across'. The word 'equality' has been airbrushed out of our political vocabulary. It's not a word that exists in our political vocabulary in England and there is a great determination to make sure that it doesn't rear its ugly head ever again. So what we've got is constituencies in England, particularly women who are feeling very tired and

disempowered at the minute, that there isn't really any space for them to speak their mind. That's why the Agreement is so interesting, because it provides a model of how to organise a government and also how to engage governments and peoples differently and how to do something about the unequal distribution of resources and respect. So I think it does provide a model that we should all be very, very interested in and certainly a model for those of us in England who are at the moment 'becalmed'.

Question 5:

You're talking about peace in Northern Ireland, can we hear how you feel about peace in the Middle East? Will there ever be peace in the Middle East? Can we just have your thoughts about that?

Bea Campbell:

There's a lot of really interesting work being done. A new book, quite technical but for those of you who are interested you might want to turn to it, written by a woman called Christine Bell, who's compared the deals done in Northern Ireland, the Middle East, the Balkans and elsewhere and what she draws attention to is the different conditions in which all of these deals were done. One of the crucial things about the Northern Ireland Agreement was that in order to produce an Agreement that would work it was never going to be possible to do a deal that excluded the most unruly, and perceived as the most dangerous, participants. So the deal, which I think was the deal that the British Government thought that it was going to pull off in the early 1990s, around about 93/94 when the talks were very intense and there were ceasefires, I think what the British Government thought it was going to be able to pull off was a deal between itself and 'respectable' Nationalism and Unionism and that the project had to be to defeat the Republicans and to guarantee the permanent exile of Republicans from political society in Northern Ireland. Of course that project was doomed because it doesn't matter whether you like them or not, like and distaste are irrelevant, these people had a social base. Whenever they were allowed to participate in the elections they got something like 16% of the vote, and in a very divided community that's a very significant part of the vote. Also they represented an extraordinary moral authority in their own communities as, it must be said, so do the Loyalists. So there was no good in ever doing a deal that was going to exclude who you thought were the 'nasties'.

The 'nasties' had to be part of the deal otherwise it couldn't ever prevail and you also had to create the conditions in which everybody else had a stake in the deal. Indeed

were enabled to design the deal. So the reason that you got things like sexual orientation, ethnicity in the deal is because these issues, that would have been regarded as absolutely not important by people who saw themselves as closest to the deal making, during the process of creating the peace and arguing about what this deal was going to be all of these constituencies had their say because they were there rattling around in parliament buildings in the last hours. And of course something had been appealed to which, it must be said, probably, and who knows whether it will be permanent, but probably in that moment produced people at their absolute best. It was in those last 36 hours that David Trimble, a narrow-minded man, was probably better than he's ever been before or since. For a very good reason, he allowed himself to be better, he called up the best in himself, and so in that moment that society called up the best in itself. And I don't mean that sentimentally because they were nice and produced a peace. This was a site in which everybody was having a think and sorting something out and that's crucially different from the ways in which for instance the deal was done in the Middle East.

Not least because many of the protagonists there were not allowed to be part of the process of making the deal, the people to whom it mattered most were certainly not allowed to be part of the process of making the deal. And indeed when Arafat was negotiating with this lot but had meanwhile despatched his other lot over there to have a conversation that he knew was irrelevant, that tells you a great deal about what the conditions of the deal making were. It was far away, in other words, from the people who were going to have to live with the deal. And of course it instantly unravelled because it didn't deliver what that society needed. Also, crucially, one half in a sense always knew it was never going to be disciplined by the deal, and it wasn't. It knew with complete confidence that no external eye would be brought to its practises and no external disciplinary force would make it deliver what they had to relinquish as well as what they might acquire, which was peace. It was a doomed deal, with absolutely dreadful consequences of course. The conditions for the Northern Ireland deal were absolutely different and that's why it will survive and the Middle East deal won't, and didn't and doesn't.

Thank you