

TIME TO TALK ABOUT TERRORISM

- Modern radicalisation and extremism could be calmed using an approach pioneered in the Northern Irish Troubles
- Staffordshire University research uncovers the secret history of Government negotiations with Northern Ireland paramilitaries
- The work has attracted the attention of policymakers, the intelligence community and historians

Can paramilitary groups be brought back in to the democratic process? And can communities that feel marginalised and disempowered be persuaded away from taking up violence to achieve their ends?

Tony Craig, Associate Professor in History at Staffordshire University, believes there are valuable lessons to be learnt from the hidden history of the Troubles in Northern Ireland – and that these insights could help in preventing present-day radicalisation.

Dr Craig says, “My research is concerned with back-channel talks in Northern Ireland conducted in the 1970s, at Laneside outside Belfast.” This work has been gaining influence among historians in the UK and beyond, being well received at talks given in many universities, from Oxford and Cambridge to University College in Dublin and Meiji University in Tokyo.

His research has also had an impact beyond academia, with Dr Craig frequently invited to contribute to the debate in the international media – including a feature in Time magazine, which has a circulation of more than 3 million in the United States. Along with mainstream coverage, policymakers and practitioners have been exposed to Dr Craig’s work through his articles in journals such as Jane’s Intelligence Review.

The complex and often secret story of Laneside, he believes, has never been adequately told. He explains:

“Laneside was a suburban building near Belfast used by UK officials before the Northern Ireland Office was established. As early as 1971 the Government had people on the inside. Their job was to talk to people below the level of elected councillors or MPs. Everyone from priests to community workers.

“Eventually they began talking to members of paramilitary groups: the Provisional IRA, the UVF, the Ulster Defence Association, various groups and terrorist organisations. They brought them in, asked them what they wanted and gave them examples of how politics could work to achieve their aims without using violence.”

Today, many would consider Islamist groups to represent a similar threat to the internal security of the UK – particularly after the emergence of groups such as IS in Syria and Iraq, with a large number of British and EU citizens in their ranks.

Domestically, the possibilities are promising. He says, “One of the men who worked on the Laneside programme in the 70s pointed out that if Britain could do this in places like Birmingham, Leeds or Bradford, it could help with ‘de-radicalisation’.

To find out more about Dr Tony Craig and his Laneside research, read the case study in full at: www.staffs.ac.uk/terrorism



Dr TONY CRAIG

Associate Professor in Modern History

Tony completed his PhD at the University of Cambridge and was also Irish Government Senior Scholar at Hertford College, Oxford. His research focuses primarily on the contemporary security history of Britain and Ireland.

With expertise in Intelligence and Security Studies as well as Conflict Resolution, Tony chose to extend his area of study into political intelligence during the Northern Ireland Troubles and throughout Britain’s end of empire.

**If you can demonstrate to people
that they can achieve their aims
through other means, they don’t
become radicalised**

