

## Research Proposal

### VIOLENCE AND COMMUNITIES

The impact of political violence in Northern Ireland  
on intra-community, inter-community and community-state relationships

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#### Introduction

A recent review of the research (1) has shown that, despite the plethora of studies relating to the Northern Ireland conflict, there are still crucial gaps in our understanding of the effects of the violence which has continued since 1969. These gaps are particularly critical since they prevent us from accurately gauging the current state of community relations and the attitudes of different sections of the community towards various aspects of current political and security policies and the probable reactions of these sections to any changes in such policies.

There have, of course, been a considerable number of attitude surveys and opinion polls dealing with the expressed attitudes of the general population on a number of issues deriving from the Northern Ireland conflict, but even with the most carefully constructed questionnaire the more sensitive the issues being explored the less reliable are the responses. Furthermore, the data gives at best a partial picture since it does not necessarily tell us how these attitudes - which are, in any event, often ambiguous - are expressed in day to day behaviour. We would concur with the conclusion arrived at by Donnan and McFarlane:

'We believe that attitude surveys in general provide little more than a partial and somewhat distorted view of day to day life: In day to day life attitudes are fluid, and responsive to the exigencies of the situation. Consequently, attitudes and actions are not in any simple relationship with one another: not only do they interact but they often seem to be in apparent contradiction to one another' (2)

Probably the best example of the danger in relying solely on attitude surveys is the case of integrated education, which from a number of surveys and polls would appear to have the support of the great majority of the people whereas few families actually avail of the admittedly limited opportunities provided for integrated schooling. Indeed, proposals for the integration of teacher training colleges had to be withdrawn in the face of political and church opposition, backed up by apparently widespread public support for this opposition.

This is not to dismiss totally the explanatory or indeed the predictive value of surveys, but rather to suggest that a better understanding of attitudes and social behaviour can be reached by using such surveys in conjunction with research carried out by the techniques associated with social anthropologists: that is to say, by a combination of participant observation and formal and informal interviews over a period of time.

#### The present state of such research

There have, indeed, been a number of such studies carried out in Northern Ireland, the most important of which - from the point of view of increasing our understanding of the causes and effects of the

Northern Ireland conflict on the general population - are Rosemary Harris' study in Ballygawley in the early 1950s (3) and Frank Burton's research in the Ardoyne in the early 1970s (4). However, much of this type of research has tended to focus on small rural communities in areas such as North Down, areas which have had little direct experience of the post-1969 violence. While these studies are extremely valuable in describing the situation which prevails across wide geographical areas of the province, we believe that a fuller understanding of the effects of the continuing violence on the majority of the population would require the following studies;

1. an up-to-date study of a Catholic working-class urban area;
2. a study of a Protestant working-class urban area;
3. a study of a mixed community in the border area; and
4. a study of a small integrated community.

Item 1 is currently being studied by a researcher in West Belfast and we will have access to his findings. This proposal, therefore, relates to items 2-4.

#### Aim of the proposed studies

The aim of these studies is to examine social interaction, attitudes and behaviour within each of the three communities. The objective is - in conjunction with earlier and other current research - to arrive at a fuller understanding of the effects of the current violence and political uncertainty on the general population of the

province. The studies will be policy oriented in the sense that while the researchers will be examining a wide range of social behaviour in the different communities they will be particularly concerned with the current state of community relations and the attitudes of different sections of the population to various aspects of public policy. In particular, the studies will focus on three key issues;

- (1) to what extent have the Protestant and Catholic communities become further polarised as a result of the continuing violence and political uncertainty;
- (2) to what extent, and for what reasons, are various sections of the Northern Ireland population 'alienated' from the state; and
- (3) to what extent is the seemingly fairly high degree of social interaction between Protestants and Catholics in certain physically integrated areas - e.g. middle-class residential areas and universities - socially and politically significant or merely superficial, and to what extent does such physical integration help reduce community tension and political polarisation.

#### Methodology

The research will involve three ethnographic studies, each lasting two years, with a researcher living for a substantial part of the time in each of the areas being studied, and will involve a combination of participant observation and formal and informal interviews. The three suggested areas are:

- (1) a predominantly Protestant urban district;
- (2) a border area, and
- (3) a small integrated area.

The field work will be carried out by three researchers - to be appointed - under the general supervision of Professor Darby and Mr Hamilton. Mr Hamilton will be Director of the project and responsible for its financial administration and academic direction. One of the three researchers will be the senior researcher, employed on the 1A salary scale; his or her main responsibility, apart from the field work in one of the three areas, will include co-ordination of the three field studies and routine administration under Mr Hamilton. The other two researchers will be appointed to Studentships, and will be expected to enrol for higher degrees at the university.

The project will be centred within the Centre for the Study of Conflict and institutional support, e.g., secretarial and administrative assistance, will be provided by the Centre.

A research liaison group will be established by the PPRU. Interim reports from the research team will be presented to this group. In addition, two up-dates of the literature review mentioned in the first sentence of this proposal will be presented during the period of the project. This will require short-term research assistance.

It is recognised that one of the problems associated with such a project is ensuring comparability of data derived from the individual studies, and that obtaining such comparable data may, in fact, require slightly different approaches in each of the individual areas being

studied. To deal with the problem it is proposed to embark upon the following programme:

- (1) Induction of new researchers;
- (2) overall co-ordination of the studies by the senior researcher;
- (3) attendance by the researchers holding the Studentships at the Research Methods element of the M.Sc. course in Social Policy and Administration;
- (4) regular meetings between the researchers and the supervisors; and
- (5) a programme of seminars involving all those involved in the project and other persons connected with the Centre for the Study of Conflict.

#### Schedule

While each of the three studies would be of value in itself we feel that to achieve the maximum benefits from the research - that is to say, to help us build up an accurate picture of the situation across the province - it is preferable that all three studies should be carried out, if possible, concurrently. We propose that they should commence on 1 January 1986 or as soon as practically possible after that date.

### Budget

Salary for Senior Researcher (1A Scale) x 2 years	18,310 *
Year 1, £8920; Year 2, £9390	
National Insurance and Pensions	4,728 *
Two Post-graduate Studentships x 2 years	14,000 *
Travelling Expenses	4,500
Two up-dates of literature reviews	1,000
Printing	300
Conferences, consultations etc.	500
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	43,338
Overheads (Supervision, room, secretarial etc.)	10,834
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Total	54,172

\* Currently under review.

### References

- (1) A. Hamilton The Costs and Consequences of the Continuing Violence in Northern Ireland, (Paper prepared for PPRU October, 1984)
- (2) Donnan H. and MacFarlane G., 'Informal Social Organization' in Darby, J. (ed) The background to the Conflict, Belfast, 1983.
- (3) Harris, R., Prejudice and tolerance in Ulster: a study of neighbours and 'strangers' in a border community, Manchester, 1972.
- (4) Burton, F., The politics of legitimacy: struggles in a Belfast community, London, 1978.

Professor J. Darby  
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