

A CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY ALIENATION AND GOVERNMENT POLICY IN CATHOLIC WEST BELFAST

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aim

This paper looks at the various problems facing Catholic West Belfast, the way in which Government policy seeks to alleviate them and the effect that has on those who live there. The interaction between different aspect of Government policies is outlined, and the paper examines whether these policies work towards the same ends as is intended or whether there is scope for greater rationalisation. This paper should perform a useful and clearly-defined function. It presents a summary of executive policy in all areas, explaining and illustrating the effects of that policy on the community. The chapter headings in this paper are used for convenience and not because the areas of policy described are completely discrete. Indeed the holistic nature of policy in CWB is one of the most notable features highlighted in this paper. That said the paper does not impinge on the work already being done in the various fields covered, nor does it seek to tell those with policy responsibility in various areas how they should carry out that policy.

1.2 The paper is based on factual information drawn from civil service sources alone. This leaves considerable scope for further work to be done to gain a wider perspective into the way those who live and work in West Belfast perceive both the policies of central government particularly, and the attitudes of members of the security forces to the area. This paper seeks to point up the difficult questions that face government policy-makers; and those areas in

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which there is the possibility that the various policies are not internally consistent.

1.3 The citizen in society

The state impinges on the lives of individual citizen in a modern industrialised society, in a variety of ways, no matter what form the government takes. These include inter alia the making of laws, and supervision of their execution, providing a basic level of support and welfare for those unable to attain that level themselves, and the levy of taxation on those earning or receiving money to fund those services provided. These examples show something of the diversity and extent of everyday contact between the citizen and the State. In Northern Ireland the role of the State is particularly prominent. The public sector is far larger than in the rest of the UK, and indeed than in most industrialised countries and is a very important provider of employment. The problems caused by terrorism have led to a number of laws being introduced which circumscribe the freedom of action of the individual in ways additional to those faced by people living in Great Britain.

- 1.4 However the limited powers of local councils, and the correspondingly far greater powers exercised directly by central government or its agencies is perhaps the most striking area of difference from the rest of the UK. The functions of Local government are few and minor in comparison with local authorities in GB and throughout most of Western Europe. This concentration of power in central government, correspondingly leads to the people there expecting and demanding much more from central government, with the increased risk that disappointment will lead to disillusionment and ultimately alienation. This alienation can also be fed by the perception that those who exercise

power do not have a direct interest in the well-being of the people of Northern Ireland, as the centre of decision-making in Westminster seems remote and inaccessible.

1.5. Geography

Catholic West Belfast is not an easy area to define precisely, and statistical background information is not always collated on a precisely comparable geographical basis. For example, politically Catholic West Belfast has been defined as comprising the following wards; Glencollin, Andersonstown, Glen Road, Falls Park, Whiterock, Upper Springfield, Clonard, Ladybrook, Beechmount and Falls. Where possible, all social and economic indicators have been limited to those wards also. However for security purposes, Police Division B with its headquarters in Grosvenor Road has been taken as the area for consideration.

1.6 Statistics

In many of the fields that have been examined, figures are not readily available in the form that would fit neatly into the remit of this paper. Many Government Departments keep figures for the Greater Belfast area or Northern Ireland as a whole, but relatively few are capable of disaggregation between North and West Belfast let alone between Protestant and Catholic West Belfast. The source of statistics used in this paper, is indicated at the relevant point. It is for consideration whether more statistics ought not to be kept for disadvantaged areas to allow an appraisal of the effectiveness of policies implemented to ameliorate the specific difficulties faced there.

Recently got
crime pattern
analysis software
from (Ho?) and we are using
its application to NI
vehicle theft - may be
implications for other crime
types and/or data sets.

Issue of more detailed spatial
analysis of crime/court data
on agenda for next CJS meeting

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1. Method

The information on which this report is based was drawn from a variety of sources, all within the civil service. A list of those consulted is attached at Annex A. In addition, there have been a number of internal papers written recently which have also been drawn upon. Examples of these are the Defeating Terrorism paper and that on Reducing Community Differentials. Value judgements have been made at various points reflecting the views of the authors.