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The Political Vetting of Community Work in Northern Ireland

by
The Political Vetting
of
Community Work
Working Group

THE POLITICAL VETTING OF COMMUNITY WORK IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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Preface

This report is primarily the result of a conference organised by the Community Workers' Co-op in association with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), at Queen's University Belfast, on Saturday 28th April 1990. The theme of the conference was **Political Vetting and Community Work.** At the conference a working group was established to examine ways of supporting a campaign around the issue of the political vetting of community work in Northern Ireland and to publish a report of the conference. The working group includes representatives from the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, Community Workers' Co-op, the Committee on the Administration of Justice and the Centre for Research and Documentation. This report has been expanded to include recent developments - in particular the political vetting of Glór na nGael in August 1990.

Acknowledgements

The Political Vetting of Community Work Working Group wishes to thank all those who contributed to this report including: all those who attended the conference organised by the group in April 1990; those who acted as facilitators and reporters at the workshops; the two organisations who sponsored the conference, the Community Workers' Co-op and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), and Queen's University Students Union, Belfast. We would particularly like to thank those who provided written submissions for this report based on their contributions at the conference. These include: Dr Bill Rolston (University of Ulster); Michael Ritchie (Committee on the Administration of Justice); Elsie Best (Conway Community Education Centre); Una Marron & Maura McCrory (Falls Women's Centre); and Mary Nellis (Dove House). We would also like to thank the committee of Glencairn Community Association, in particular Jim Creighton, for providing us with the material which enabled us to include that group's experiences of political vetting in this report. Thanks are also due to Sonia, Yvonne and Fran for typing and typesetting the report and to NICVA and the Community Workers' Co-op, the Committee on the Administration of Justice and the Centre for Research and Documentation for their continuing support for the work of the Working Group.

Finally, it should be noted that all signed contributions in this report contain the views of that author. In respect of these the Working Group has simply performed an editorial function. All other written material has been written by the Working Group. The views expressed in this report therefore coincide with those of the specific authors and the Working Group and do not necessarily coincide with those held by NICVA and the Community Workers' Co-op.

The Working Group

The individual members of the Working Group are: Majella McCloskey, Féilim Ó'hAdhmaill, Michael Ritchie, Caitriona Ruane, Liz Sullivan and Philip Watt

Organisations Represented in the Working Group

Centre for Research and Documentation (CRD)

CRD is a Belfast based information resource centre which promotes a deeper understanding of the root causes of poverty and inequality in Ireland and internationally. It aims to provide organisations and individuals with accurate and up to date information on a wide range of subjects and to contribute to the work for a more just and peaceful world. CRD models itself on similar projects in Third World countries. It was established in June 1988 by individuals with overseas experience in Central America, Africa and Asia who witnessed first hand the benefits of reliable information, research and educational outreach programmes. CRD is particularly interested in looking at parallels between poverty and underdevelopment in Ireland and Third World countries.

CRD is based at 89b Glen Road, Belfast BT11
Tel: (0232) 626678

Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)

CAJ is an independent civil liberties organisation formed in 1981 to work for "the highest standards in the administration of justice in Northern Ireland by examining the operation of the current system and promoting the discussion of alternatives".

By undertaking and facilitating research, holding conferences, lobbying politicians, issuing press statements, publishing pamphlets and circulating a monthly news-sheet, CAJ hopes to raise the level of public debate around important social justice issues.

Open meetings of the full committee and visitors take place every other month to discuss current justice topics. Various sub-groups meet and work on an ongoing basis. At present the sub-groups are specifically concerned with prisons, a Bill of Rights, policing, emergency laws and aspects of social legislation.

CAJ is based at 45 Donegall Street, Belfast BT1 2FG
Tel: (0232) 232394

Community Workers' Co-op

The Community Workers' Co-op is a national network of people active at community level working for social change. Its membership encompasses a broad range of visions as to the exact nature of this social change.

Unity comes from a common belief in the conscious application of community work principles as a means of achieving change. Members are involved in a broad range of community based activities including workshops, enterprise

programmes, direct action groups, womens groups, Travellers' rights groups, youth groups, and many others.

The Community Workers' Co-op seeks to serve its membership in two ways. Firstly, it organises campaigns around issues of common concern to its members. Most recent examples include the campaigns on the spending of European Community structural funds and on local government reform in the South. Campaigns are organised by subgroups formed by members with a particular interest in the issue at stake. Secondly, the Co-op provides a forum where members and colleagues can debate issues and develop skills.

The Community Workers' Co-op is based at The Pavee Point Centre, North Great Charles Street, Dublin 1
Tel: (0001) 732802

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)

NICVA's primary objective is to encourage and assist voluntary action and community development in all its forms throughout Northern Ireland. Its membership is drawn from voluntary and community groups, and also includes individuals who support the Council's aims. NICVA's services and activities, as set out in its annually revised Development Plan, are outlined below.

NICVA:
- promotes, supports and facilitates voluntary action in Northern Ireland, with emphasis on action aimed at socially disadvantaged individuals and communities;
- provides a regional service of information, support and training for voluntary organisations;
- identifies by itself or in co-operation with other bodies, community needs which can be met by voluntary and community organsiations and develops projects to meet those needs;
- provides opportunities for voluntary organisations to consider matters of social concern, and to express their views to the Government and other relevant bodies.

Specific projects include a Charities Advice Service, the Tenants' Participation Advisory Service, the Regional Community Development Project, the Volunteer Development Resource Unit, Give As You Earn, Cheques for Charity, SCOPE magazine, and specialist information and training services for voluntary and community organisations in Northern Ireland.

NICVA is based at 127 Ormeau Road, Belfast BT7 1SH
Tel: (0232) 321224

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Section 1

INTRODUCTION

1

The Background

The political vetting in August 1990 of the respected Irish language umbrella group, Glór na nGael, served as a timely reminder, if one were needed, of the pervasive nature and scope of the State's political vetting of community work in Northern Ireland. Although it is probably fair to say that such State vetting has always taken place in the past it would have come under the heading of State political and/or religious discrimination. The current form of such vetting is in many ways much more subtle. In the past whole minority social groups were treated as subversive, stereotyped as such and denied equality of opportunity in housing, jobs and services. While such discrimination undoubtedly still exists, in recent years the trend has been away from labelling mass populations or social groupings as subversive and towards a more specific approach. In other words, nowadays the State is more discriminatory against whom it discriminates, and in its approach to potential threats to its power and control within local communities.

The current form of political vetting of local communities and the organisations and groups which represent them, causing most concern is that initiated by Douglas Hurd, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in June 1985. According to this policy, explained in Chapter Two, community groups which are alleged by the State to have some association with paramilitary groups are denied access to public funds and are blacklisted.

That groups can be labelled and blacklisted without any specific allegations having to be brought by the State, with no evidence having to be presented and with no form of redress being available to groups so affected goes against all the tenets of natural justice. It is reminiscent of the dark old days of the McCarthy era in the USA when individuals could be ruined for life on the basis of having been labelled communist, or as a result of suspicions and innuendoes having been made about those with whom they associated. In the Northern Ireland context not only does political vetting affect the funding and thus the activities of the particular groups vetted but it also has the potential for leaving anyone associated with the vetted group exposed to the threat of political assassination. Vetting also has an indirect adverse effect on community groups and community work generally in Northern Ireland in that it leads to self vetting, self censorship and an atmosphere of near paranoia, especially in the more deprived areas where vetting has been most prevalent. It leads to groups altering their legitimate activities and refusing to get involved in campaigns which could lead to an improvement in the quality of life for their communities, because they are afraid that these may give the Government encouragement to vet them. As a result the political vetting policy is like a cancer eating away at any genuine attempts by local communities to identify and address their collective needs.

The current report is a response from a number of concerned community workers in Ireland to the political vetting process here and an attempt on their part to highlight such concerns. In particular it is a report of a conference held in Queen's University Belfast in April 1990. However, the report also includes an update to include events which have taken place since then. The April conference was organised jointly by the Community Workers Co-op, an all Ireland body representing community workers and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, an umbrella group for voluntary sector groups in Northern Ireland. The idea for the conference arose at the Kilkenny conference on Community Work in Ireland organised jointly by the Community Workers Co-op, The Combat Poverty Agency and the youth and community work courses of

St Patrick's College, Maynooth in late 1989. A central issue at that conference was the relationship between community groups and the State. Funding was one of the aspects of that relationship explored. In particular, participants from Northern Ireland identified political vetting as a feature in the funding of community groups which captured much that was problematic in the relationship between community groups and the State there.

It was also recognised that, after the initial bout of vigorous campaigning by the particular groups denied funding by the State due to political vetting, many groups had now become resigned to the fact that the policy was going to stay. The last major conference on the issue had been held at Conway Mill in May 1988, resulting in a widely distributed publication. However, there was little activity until the Kilkenny conference in late 1989.

It was decided to hold a conference on the subject at Queen's University to try to reactivate the campaign. NICVA was approached to co-sponsor the event and local community groups were asked to participate. At the conference which was attended by representatives from a wide cross-section of the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland (see Appendix I) the Political Vetting of Community Work Working Group was established. One of the tasks it was asked to undertake was the production of this report.

The report is broken up into three main sections. Section One is the introduction and is self-explanatory, Section Two,concentrates on the report of the conference itself, and Section Three concludes the report with an update of events since the conference.

The authors of this report do not claim to have produced an authoratative account of all the issues surrounding the question of political vetting. They are sure that other questions not raised here could and should be raised about this topic. Constraints on space prevent them pursuing these at length here. However, they do believe that this report is an important contribution to the debate and hope that it will provide a valuable resource for the campaign which lies ahead.

The Political Vetting of Community Work Working Group, October 1990

Section 2

CONFERENCE ON THE POLITICAL VETTING OF COMMUNITY WORK

2

Political Vetting: An Overview

By Bill Rolston (University of Ulster)

Introduction

On 27th June 1985, Douglas Hurd, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, stated in the House of Commons that, while the Government was determined to support genuine "voluntary and community-based activity" in Northern Ireland:

> "I am satisfied, from information available to me, that there are cases in which some community groups, or persons prominent in the direction or management of some community groups, have sufficiently close links with paramilitary organisations to give rise to a grave risk that to give support to those groups would have the effect of improving the standing and furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation, whether directly or indirectly. I do not consider that any such use of government funds would be in the public interest, and in any particular case in which I am satisfied that these conditions prevail no grant will be paid."
> (See Appendix II).

On exactly the same day a letter was sent from the Department of Economic Development (DED) to the Conway Mill Women's Self-Help Group in West Belfast. A few months earlier the group had reached an agreement with the DED for hiring two workers under the Action for Community Employment (ACE) scheme to run a creche. The letter stated:

> "I am directed to inform you that the Secretary of State has decided that it is not in the public interest that the grant should continue to be paid under the agreement of February 1985".
> (See Appendix III).

What crime had the Women's Self-Help Group committed to be singled out thus? Running a creche? Although not stated in the letter it was clear that the reason for the victimisation was that they had had the temerity to set up their creche in a building which was a prime target for Douglas Hurd and his officials, the Conway Mill.

To many, Hurd's announcement and the victimisation of the creche seemed to be a bolt from the blue. In fact the battle against Conway Mill had begun earlier. It was orchestrated in the first instance by SDLP councillor Brian Feeney who had insisted that "certain so-called community centres" were in fact "Provo fronts"and as a result they should have all Government grants to them cut off and should be closed down. The Mill trustees had begun to head down a number of promising avenues in relation to job creation only to find major obstacles suddenly and inexplicably put in their way. They had entered into negotiations with Belfast Enterprise Zone officials and had reached agreement in principle for a scheme costing a mere £80,000 which promised to deliver somewhere in the region of 250 jobs. The Enterprise Zone officials however pulled out of the agreement at the eleventh hour.

The trustees had also been at an advanced stage in negotiations with the Local Enterprise Development Unit (LEDU)for backing for the Mill. LEDU pulled out too. (See Appendix IV). In other words, even before Douglas Hurd's public

statement it was clear that a concerted effort was being made to block any projects associated with the Conway Mill from funds originating in the DED. In fact, it is likely that it was the lobbying by groups associated with the Conway Mill for funds which finally forced Douglas Hurd to make the issue of the Government's victimisation of community groups a public one.

The Facts

In the years following Douglas Hurd's statement a number of other groups became victims of what came to be known as "political vetting". According to the **Report of the Public Enquiry into the Political Vetting of Community Groups in Northern Ireland** (May 1988), these groups included:

* **Conway Community Enterprises**: Funding for four ACE workers was withdrawn and negotiations with Belfast Enterprise Zone and with LEDU to refurbish the Mill in order to create small job creation units were terminated after they had reached an advanced stage;

***Conway Mill Creche**: Funding for two ACE workers was withdrawn in June 1985;

***Conway Education Centre**: This began as an adjunct of the education work carried out in Springhill Community House. In 1985 the management of the latter were told that they could only continue to have funding for ACE workers if none of these workers operated out of Conway Mill. In 1987, a few weeks before classes were due to begin in the Conway Education Centre, the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) informed the management there that they would no longer pay for tutors to work in the Mill. The reason given was the Board's "ongoing policy of rationalisation". After sustained lobbying from the Education Centre management the Board admitted that they had been advised "by the Department of Education that the Secretary of State had taken a decision to withhold Government support from groups using the Conway Mill";

* **Belfast Exposed**: This is a photography association which received funding for one ACE worker in August 1984, almost a year before Hurd's statement. However this was only on the condition that they based the worker anywhere else but where they had originally intended, namely Conway Mill;

***Lá**: The Irish language daily newspaper was based in the Conway Mill after its previous premises had been damaged in a fire. It had funding for its five ACE workers withdrawn in September 1985 and was told by an Irish Government official that it would not receive any NIO funding until it vacated the Mill;

***Naíscoil Mhic Airt**: This Irish language nursery school in Belfast had funding for five ACE workers withdrawn in February 1987;

***Twinbrook Tenants' and Community Association**: This tenants' body lost its six ACE workers in August 1987;

***Shantallow Tenants' Association**: This group had an application for eleven ACE workers withdrawn and funding for its existing ACE workers terminated in February 1986;

***Dove House, Derry**: It had funding for four ACE workers withdrawn in June 1986 and restored, after a remarkable campaign of lobbying, in August 1986;

***Gobnascale Community Centre, Derry**: It was also vetted, although the exact details are unclear.

***Falls Women's Centre:** It was vetted by Belfast City Council, which intially removed its funding but restored it after a vigorous campaign by women's groups and a legal case;

***Glencairn Community Association:** It had funding for its fifty three ACE workers withdrawn in December 1989.

Table 1 Community Groups which lost funding for ACE posts as a result of political vetting.

COMMUNITY GROUP	NO. OF ACE POSTS LOST	DATE
Conway Community Enterprises, Belfast	4	June 1985
Conway Mill Creche, Belfast	2	June 1985
Conway Education Centre, Belfast		1985
Lá, (Irish language newspaper), Belfast (did not lose posts, but forced to move premises)	5	Sept.1985
Shantallow Tenants' Association, Derry	11	Feb. 1986
Dove House, Derry	4	June 1986
Naíscoil Mhic Airt, Belfast	5	Feb. 1987
Twinbrook Tenants' & Community Association, Belfast	6	Aug. 1987
Glencairn Community Association, Belfast	53	Dec. 1989

When funding was denied, these groups received no more than a letter informing them of the withdrawal of funding, and a copy of Douglas Hurd's June 1985 Commons statement. No further explanations were made available to any of the groups despite repeated requests from the management committees, sympathetic organisations such as Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) and Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO), and sympathetic Members of Parliament (MPs) such as Chris Mullin and Jim Marshall.

A number of general points need to be made in relation to all this. First of all the power of the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) is colossal. In 1982 a group of economists, business people and trade unionists criticised the DED and other NIO departments for having "a concentration of economic decision making power ... greater than in any other Western European country". Since that time that power has increased.

The purse strings for most endeavours in Northern Ireland - whether held by local councils, quangoes, or voluntary organisations - lead back directly to the NIO. This gives the NIO a lot of scope to put pressure on other agencies of Government or bodies funded by Government to keep them in line with NIO thinking. It has already been mentioned how the Department of Education, Northern Ireland (DENI), BELB, LEDU, and the Enterprise Zone officials were persuaded to adhere to the centralised diktat of the NIO in the case of Conway Mill. There are other examples. Rupert Stanley College of Further Education withdrew tutors from the Conway Education Project after being informed by DENI that it would lose one pound of funding for every pound it used in supporting the Conway Mill. The Workers' Education Association (WEA) was told likewise, but to its credit, refused to concede to DENI pressure. Belfast City Council has also admitted that, from April 1988 on, its Community Services Department was passing grant aid applications to the DENI for vetting. Derry City Council, on the other hand, refused in April 1988 to vet applications for ACE jobs on behalf of the DED on the grounds that when they had positively backed Shantallow Community Centre previously, the DED had ignored their

advice and withdrawn funding from the Centre.

A second point which should be noted is that virtually all European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) money goes through either the DED or theother NIO departments. It is allocated by them in accordance with government political prejudices. It is not peanuts. For example, between 1982 and 1987 the DED alone received almost £197m from the ESF. This money went mainly on ACE and Youth Training Programme (YTP) schemes. As ACE has been at the centre of the political vetting of community initiatives, in effect the European Economic Community (EEC) has allowed the DED to make prejudiced political decisions about the allocations of its (the EEC's) funds.

A third point is that since the signing of the Hillsborough Agreement money has been available through the International Fund for Ireland. This money, allocated from outside the North, mainly from the US Government, and belonging to a body nominally independent of the NIO, is nevertheless still distributed according to NIO criteria, including that of political vetting. Thus when Conway Mill Community Enterprises applied for financial asistance from the International Fund in February 1988, they were refused on the grounds that "the Board of the Fund has been advised that it would be inconsistent with the policies and priorities of the Government of the United Kingdom to accede to your application". (See Appendix V). The Anglo-Irish Agreement has given the NIO further scope for pursuing political vetting.

The Problem

There are two ways in which it might be said that political vetting isn't really a problem at all here.

It could be said that no decent citizen would want money to go to paramilitary groups and therefore there has to be political vetting in order to ensure that the possibility of paramilitary groups receiving funds from the public purse is nipped in the bud.

On the other hand, it could be said that the effects of political vetting in any event are really minimal. In 1988/9 the DED spent almost £40m on ACE. All the victimised groups together account for a very, very small proportion of this amount. With the exception of Glencairn, the funding withdrawn was for no more than a handful of ACE workers in each case.

Two responses can be made to the first point, that no decent citizen would want money to go to paramilitary groups anyway.

Firstly, if funds are to be withdrawn from a group on account of an alleged crime, then principles of natural justice need to be followed. A specific charge must be made, evidence produced in an open setting, and provisions made for adequate defence, including the right of appeal. Above all, the charges must be levelled at named individuals whether the alleged crime was done in an individual capacity or on behalf of the organisation which they represent. None of these criteria exist in relation to political vetting. Instead of charges, there is innuendo. The organisation victimised has no comeback against the libel and defamation suffered, since approaches to the NIO, from no matter how high a source, produce a stock answer which merely reiterates Douglas Hurd's statement of June 1985. There is no defence, no appeal, no open legal procedure involved. Above all, the generality of the accusations, as well as the invisibility of the process by which the decision is reached, means that everyone associated with the organisation which is vetted is in fact targeted. On top of this, several groups have had funding withdrawn not because it was alleged that they themselves had

done anything improper but simply because of where they happened to be based. Thus, the withdrawal of funding from the Conway Mill Creche was not because anyone in the NIO seriously believed that there was any connection between infants and local paramilitary groups, but because the creche was situated in the Conway Mill. As John Stanley, a Minister at the NIO, later wrote to Chris Mullin MP: "I should like to make it clear that the decision affects all activities operating in or out of the Mill complex ...". Similarly the MacAírt Naiscoil suffered, not because of anything it was doing, but because it rented premises from St. Matthew's Tenants' Association against whom the political vetting was directed in the first instance.

A second response revolves around the question what does it mean to say that a group has connections to paramilitaries anyway? After twenty-one years of the "Troubles" how many community groups and voluntary organisations have never employed an ex-prisoner or ex-internee, or had some political activists use its services? For that matter, how many employees of Government have political skeletons in their cupboards? If the Government was really serious about political vetting, consistent vetting would take up an awful lot more of its time, and could leave it in the position of being too wary to sponsor anything at all. Given that a witchhunt of this scale is not occuring, why pick on some people and groups rather than others? Moreover, if the NIO is going to vet, surely it ought to be consistent in another sense and vet across the board. Would proper vetting have resulted in John De Lorean being given £80m of state funds to set up a motor car factory after having been turned down previously by the Governments of Puerto Rico and the Republic of Ireland? De Lorean was not vetted; he was wooed. Would proper vetting have enabled a light engineering firm in Ballynahinch to be praised by LEDU as "financially viable" and "producing a good product" and funded accordingly, and then to be discovered in September 1988 producing machine guns for loyalist use?

There have to be criteria for allocating funds, but those criteria should rest entirely on the viability of the project seeking the funding. Market researchers, accountants, architects and professional analysts of all kinds have developed means of trying to assess viability. Whether or not these means are the best possible is not the point. The point is that, if they exist, they should be applied fairly and evenly. It is no good funding an unviable but high prestige project while rejecting a viable project which in some way does not fit with current Government prejudices. To use a notion that the Government itself likes to refer to a lot these days, decisions should be made on merit and on merit alone.

There are also two responses to the second view mentioned earlier, that the effects of political vetting are really minimal.

Firstly, although the direct effects of vetting are minimal, it is difficult to gauge what the indirect effects might be. It is likely that many groups do not bother applying for funds knowing or believing that they would be refused. It is impossible to know how many groups or individuals have failed to use the services offered by the vetted groups for fear of being tarred with the same brush. All that can be concluded is that the list of vetted groups does not give the full picture of the effects of political vetting.

Secondly, taking only those groups which we know to have been vetted, the fact that the amount of funding involved is small, in fact, provides a clue to what political vetting is all about. ACE provides money for (not very good) wages. There is also a nominal amount received by the organisation for administration. All of the schemes vetted, even the biggest of all, Glencairn, were receiving money for wages and little else. The question which arises, then, is this: could a well-organised and ruthless paramilitary group not figure out quicker and easier ways of raking in a lot more money? Even if every single member of the

management committee and every ACE worker in the vetted groups was in the IRA and UVF there would have been little financial value for the IRA or UVF. You cannot buy a lot of Semtex with what is left over at the end of a week out of an ACE salary. To understand political vetting one has to understand that it is not really about money at all, but about legitimacy. Douglas Hurd's statement reveals this quite clearly. He makes it clear that his intention is that there should be no chance of government action "improving the standing and furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation". The battle is not one over piddling amounts of funds but an instance in the propaganda war.



Courtesy of John Byrne

Why Political Vetting?

Although the big picture cannot be painted in such a short space as this submission, it has to be said that political vetting is only a small detail in a very big picture. In the aftermath of the republican Hunger Strike of 1981 and the consequent rise of Sinn Fein, the NIO increasingly became involved in a new phase of what might be called quite simply counter-insurgency - the battle for hearts and minds in working class areas where the victimised community groups operate. At the core of this battle was the need to control, directly or indirectly, community initiatives, including job creation initiatives, in these areas. Direct control came through a number of existing organisations such as LEDU, the DED's Community Projects Branch (ACE) and new ones such as the International Fund for Ireland and the Making Belfast Work initiative with its Belfast Action Teams (BAT).

Indirect control was assured in a much more surprising way. Up until two and a half decades ago the Catholic Church was relatively illegitimate in the eyes of the Stormont Government. But the coincidence of a Catholic bishop in Belfast, less nationalist than most of his predecessors, and a direct rule NIO team intent in ensuring neo-colonial rather than colonial control of the contested local areas, meant that when the NIO looked around for a safe conduit for funds and initiatives into nationalist areas where Sinn Féin had a strong foothold, the Catholic Church was willing and able to fulfill that role. This is not to say that there was a direct meeting of minds. The NIO's purpose was unequivocally that of counter-insurgency, as Richard Needham stated in a Radio Ulster interview in November 1989:

> "It has to be in our interests to try to get more jobs in West Belfast... that is the way in which we will reduce the terrorist menace, by making people economically independent from terrorism. **That is the prime strategic objective of the Government"** (Author's emphasis).

The Catholic Church's position however is likely to be couched more generally in a desire for peace and an end to violence. Where the two interests have come to coincide, however, is in seeing the elimination of Sinn Féin's influence in local areas as the key task.

In this endeavour everything becomes painted in very stark terms. Community groups and initiatives are either legitimate or not. In real terms, in places like West Belfast, this has practically come to mean Catholic Church linked or not. So the refusal of money to a creche is not really about childminding at all. It is about the creation of legitimacy. To create the illegitimate is to enhance the status of most things which are labelled legitimate. To enhance the status of the legitimate also often requires one to decrease the status of that which is labelled illegitimate. The battle for hearts and minds requires some devils now and again. It does not really matter how many, or how important they are in real terms. What is important is the symbolism. Creating the correct image requires the making of a few examples. The diversionary value of this strategy is also clear; while everyone is busy arguing over -" Evil" - is the creche connected to the Provos or not? - "Good" gets off scott free. Few are questioning articulately enough the right of the Church to monopolise State funds in this way.

The focus above has been deliberately on nationalist West Belfast. This has been for two reasons. Firstly, in sheer quantity terms, the bulk of political vetting has been experienced in nationalist West Belfast. That is no surprise given the fact that it is very much the cockpit in terms of Richard Needham's project as described above. As he said in the Irish Times recently, "it is coming to eyeball-to-eyeball time with Mr Adams". Secondly, despite the adverse effects political vetting has also had in unionist areas it is widely believed that unionist areas are not in fact the real target . Rather republicanism is the enemy for the NIO and so the propaganda war requires the identification and punishment of groups said to be connected with republicanism. Why then have unionist groups been picked out for attention? It can only be presumed that a major element in that decision was to take a bit of the bad look off the NIO. After all, if the unionists are suffering too, the NIO cannot be acting in a sectarian manner, can they?

Fightback

What are the possibilities of fighting back against political vetting? Some tactics have been tried, and some others have been discussed. There are a number of pros and cons connected to the various methods which have been put forward to oppose the NIO's policy. These various methods can be categorised together under three separate headings: legal tactics; lobbying; and community self-support.

Legal tactics

The lawyers who heard evidence from community groups at the **Political Vetting Public Tribunal** in May 1988 suggested a number of possible legal avenues of redress for groups which had experienced political vetting. They suggested that the DED's policy might be challenged through a judical review. They also recommended scrutiny of the **Northern Ireland Constitution Act (1973)** and the **Fair Employment Act (1976)** to see if they could be used as a basis of appeal. They recommended looking at the possibility of taking

complaints to the Ombudsman. Finally, they suggested that it was possible that the DED was acting contrary to the **European Convention of Human Rights**, and that therefore a case could be taken to Europe. There are at least three problems with these suggestions, which the lawyers probably realised and hence were extremely cautious in their conclusions.

Firstly, legal actions are costly in terms of both finances and emotions. In the Northern Ireland context they can also be life-threatening. Not every community activist would appreciate being so publicly identified as a representative of a group the government has accused of having connections with paramilitary groups.

Secondly, at least one of these legal avenues has been pursued, only to fail. The Conway Mill management lodged a complaint with the Ombudsman in 1987. Almost a year later the Ombudsman told them that he could not pursue the case as it fell outside his jurisdiction. It is not paranoia to suspect that other legal avenues would lead to similar brick walls.

Thirdly, the ultimate weapon in the Government's legal arsenal on this matter is to claim that exceptional circumstances require exceptional measures. On such a claim the British Government has frequently derogated from the European Convention on Human Rights. It also uses this in relation to fair employment legislation, where a claim of state security being at stake can prevent the investigation of cases of alleged discrimination. There is no doubt that the Government would play the same card if any legal move on political vetting looked like being successful.

There is one other suggested strategy in relation to defending victimised groups which involves the establishment of quasi-legal mechanisms to ensure that natural justice is fulfilled. The most comprehensive such strategy was suggested by the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU). They urged a seven-point plan which would involve the DED informing the community group of the alleged paramilitary links involved and allowing twenty-eight days for a reply, on the basis of which the DED would lay out specific changes necessary in the group's behaviour to prevent the termination of funding. If the group did not accept these changes, then the Ombudsman would be called in to sort it out. (See Appendix VI).

One reaction to this however is that few would like to see a monopolistic and non-accountable body like the DED with little legal experience being involved in such crucial legal decisions. More fundamentally, there are already more than enough legal mechanisms to bring **individuals** to court. As the lawyers in the public tribunal in 1988 pointed out, the Emergency Provisions Act (EPA) Section 21 and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) Section 10 give the Government powers to prosecute anyone suspected of lending support to proscribed organisations. Not using the rule of law (distorted as it is in the north) makes political vetting equivalent to internment. Adding quasi-legal frills such as those suggested by ICTU is a mere gloss over an unjust process. Let them either charge the people concerned or leave the community group alone.

Lobbying

Lobbying has been highly successful in the case of Dove House who managed to have their funds restored after canvassing the support of a broad range of politicians both in Derry and outside. The Conway Mill too has been able to get wide support, including, more surprisingly - considering Brian Feeney's continued public defamation of the Mill - that of SDLP party leader John Hume. Although it still has not been able to get the funding ban lifted. This latter case shows that there are problems too with lobbying despite the successes.

Firstly, successes cannot be repeated automatically. In the case of Dove House, for example, a crucial factor was the support of Derry City Council. Other vetted groups, especially in the Belfast area, are unlikely to find their local councils particularly sympathetic to their case.

Secondly, the real problem in relation to the NIO is not just the size and monopoly of power by Government Departments, but the fact that government is non-accountable. If the British Government will not listen to the European Court of Human Rights in relation to its administration of justice in the north, why should it listen to a community group? If it fobs off MPs in parliament with bland and arrogant replies to questions about political vetting, it is hardly going to listen to NIACRO, NICVA, the Corrymeela Community, the Alliance Party, John Hume and everyone else who has spoken out on behalf of the Conway Mill, for example.

The ultimate problem in this regard is the total absence of democratic processes. Despite its limitations democracy is at least based on notions of rationality and on conventions that people listen to considered arguments and respond in kind. This is not the style of Thatcherism. For the most part it has not even been the style of Labour administrations here - remember Roy Mason! Given this, the scope for lobbying is limited. The reason is, of course, that decisions about vetting are **political,** not **rational**, and the British Government will only be persuaded to change its ways out of political expediency. That is why, for example, the current fair employment legislation, weak and belated as it is, has come about.

Community Support

As in many other issues, perhaps the most that can be done is a rearguard action - a defensive rather than offensive strategy. This should not be seen as a pessimistic conclusion, but rather a realistic one. There will be some small gains and quite a few setbacks. But it is worth bearing in mind two points. Firstly, that things would be much worse if defensive actions did not occur and, secondly, that failure may not be due to lack of activity, but because of the size of the problem which community groups are faced with. As was said earlier, political vetting is one small detail of a very big picture; it is not surprising if decisions are not easily overturned.

In conclusion it is important to state that the greatest support for victimised groups is the support of other community groups. The ways in which other community groups can help the vetted ones should include the following:

* Do not let Government definitions sway your belief about a group and its work; if you think the project is a sound one do not start changing your mind if a witchhunt begins against it;

* Do not accept replacement funds; if a group is refused an application for funds or workers, and the NIO turns round and offers it to another local group instead, that group should not scab; ultimately, if the NIO thinks your group is respectable enough to have offered you such funds you should have no trouble finding some other project they will support which will not involve scabbing;

* Continue to support the facilities and services of the vetted group, especially through use;

* Raise the issue of political vetting whenever possible; in interviews or features in the media, in discussions with Government bodies; this means that such publicisation should not be left to the victims, but that all groups should use every opportunity to show that the NIO is facing a community movement united on the

principle that funds should be distributed on merit, and not on political prejudice;

*Do not be divided; do not concede in any way that community groups are naturally divided into the respectable and the non-respectable;

* Above all, do not concede the legitimacy of Government decisions on vetting in any way; do not ostracise vetted groups; do not make private asides to officials that you suspect something shady about the vetted group; there is a battle for legitimacy going on here; if one group is illegitimate today, why not your group tomorrow? In the battle for hearts and minds show that your heart and mind belong with the community movement and not with those who wish to slander and marginalise fellow community groups.

3

The Experience of Local Community Groups

The Conway Mill Experience

by Elsie Best

Conway Mill was an old flax mill situated in Conway Street off the Falls Road, which closed down in 1974. In 1982 a group of people in the community came together and decided to buy the disused empty building to encourage economic development in the West Belfast area and to promote education. (The group now holds a twenty year lease on the premises rent free). The committee included a priest, an accountant, a solicitor and a business man.

The initial objective was to establish workshops in the Mill which could be used for training purposes or rented out to local people who wanted to start up their own business, at a low or nominal rent.



Conway Mill, Belfast

Originally four ACE workers were obtained and in 1984 Rupert Stanley College of Further Education agreed to pay tutors for education classes. A creche was also organised to look after the children of mothers attending the classes and ACE workers were obtained for this.

It was this creche which was the first to be hit by the Government's political vetting policy. On the day in June 1985 after Douglas Hurd made his statement in the House of Commons, the Conway creche received a letter through the post (from the Department of Economic Development) stating that its ACE funding was to be withdrawn in September. The group were simply referred to an enclosed copy of Hurd's statement as the reason for the funding withdrawal decision.

After this a number of other community and business ventures based in the Mill were also informed that ACE funding would be removed if they remained there. Lá, for example, the Irish language daily newspaper, lost five ACE workers in September 1985 because it was based at Conway Mill.

The Springhill Community House Education Project operated partly at Springhill House and partly in Conway Mill where it was known as Conway Mill Education Centre. Shortly after the creche received its letter from the DED, Springhill also received a letter informing it that it too would lose its ACE scheme unless it was prepared to move all its workers from the Mill. In order to keep the workers Springhill complied with this directive. For the next year however, the tutors in the Mill still continued to receive funding from Rupert Stanley College. Then in September 1987 just before the classes were about to begin, the group running the classes were told by telephone that this funding was being stopped. In subsequent correspondence it transpired that both the Department of Education (DENI) and the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) were acting on the instructions of the Northern Ireland Office (NIO). It was clear that the objection against the project was simply that it was based in Conway Mill.

The Education Project organised a theatre, three class rooms, a creche and a canteen in the Conway Mill premises. Whilst it has continued with much of these activities the lack of funding has a detrimental effect on further development. Currently it depends for its support on donations from friends at home and abroad and from various grant-making trusts such as Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust. For a long time the Arts Council continued to fund educational and cultural activities in the Mill despite Government pressure to desist. Then in 1989 - 4 years after Hurd's original statement - they finally wrote to the Education Project to state that they had to stop the funding as their jobs were now on the line.

The withdrawal of funding from Conway Mill was taken up with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (the Ombudsman) but after almost a year the groups were told that the matter fell outside the Commission's jurisdiction. The group did not proceed further with legal action, either through the Courts or through the Fair Employment Agency. It did however, organise a major lobby campaign both in Ireland, Britain, and internationally. However, the Government decision has remained unchanged to date.

Falls Women's Centre

by Una Marron & Maura McCorry



Falls Women's Centre, Belfast

The Falls Women's Centre is a small independent charity formed in 1983. Since opening it has made use of the Government's ACE scheme to enable it to broaden the scope of itswork and to offer short-term employment to women in what is an unemployment black spot. ACE funding at present enables the centre to offer employment to eleven local women. The Centre's work ranges from straight-forward advice to long-term counselling, creche service, educational facilities and a women's drop-in-centre.

From the outset those involved in the Centre were determined that it would be more than just a service used by individual women to solve their individual problems. Instead it has also campaigned on a number of issues in an attempt to raise the profile of women within their communities and to build links between women's groups including those which many would see as holding widely differing political perspectives. The Centre has therefore been involved in campaigns on issues such as health cuts, censorship, sexual harassment, rape, welfare issues, strip searching, and others.

Falls Women's Centre believes that community work is about empowering the community to take responsibility and control for itself.

In 1987 the Centre, along with several other small independent groups which ran ACE schemes, came under severe pressure from the DED to be subsumed into a larger and more politically acceptable group. In order to protect themselves from this these small groups formed the West Belfast Consortium of Small ACE Groups.

This Consortium entered into a series of meetings with the DED to explain the fears of small independent groups concerning how ACE was developing and to impress upon the DED that such groups would not tolerate ACE being used as a means of political and community control. (It should be noted that the main avenue of Government funding for the voluntary sector here is through the ACE programme).

However, negotiations were abruptly ended when one of the groups involved in the Consortium (Twinbrook Tenants' Association) was informed that its funding was to cease. The only explanation provided for this by the DED came in the form of a letter quoting the infamous Douglas Hurd statement in the Commons.

For community groups one of the most disturbing aspects of this type of political vetting is that although allegations are made against them and slanders freely spread there is no legal redress, no right to appeal and no right to reply. Workers and users of groups are put under threat and tragically may even lose their lives.

The case of Falls Women's Centre is different from most other politically vetted groups in that its funding was withdrawn by Belfast City Council rather than by the DED. This happened at the beginning of 1990 and for months some councillors were allowed to make dangerous political allegations about the work of the Centre and its workers without having to back them up with evidence. The Centre had no right of reply and no means to defend itself. Without the support of other groups it could very quickly have become isolated, demoralised and undermined.

However unlike those groups whose funding has been cut by the DED, the Falls Women's Centre had a legal avenue through which to challenge the council decision. It was this legal case coupled with the support of a broad range of community bodies and the fact that the Council lacked the power which the NIO holds, which made it easier for the Falls Women's Centre to win its funding back again. Despite the Council overturning its original decision the Centre has no means of challenging the extremely damaging political allegations made against it, and still being made by certain politicians.

Falls Women's Centre believe that whilst community groups are dependent on State funding, governments will always try to ensure that State funding is used to silence the community, rather than empower it.

It believes that it is time community groups stopped bowing to government pressures and started fighting back, planning strategy and ensuring that real community work, working for change, continues.

Dove House Derry: A Successful Campaign?

by Mary Nellis

The Background to the Vetting of Dove House

Dove House was originally built as a home for the elderly of the Bogside area of Derry City. It housed about nine pensioners, and was in design and size, totally inadequate for its stated purpose. In the early seventies, most of the old people were moved to more spacious accommodation, and the house lay vacant for many years.

In the early eighties, I was teaching literacy in a local YTP Scheme. We had as part of the project discussed the problems associated with the lack of skills in reading and writing and many of the young people had raised the question in the local communities. When the scheme was finished they decided to set up their own educational office, where they could share with the people, what they had learned.

I was asked to assist them in finding premises and Dove House seemed the obvious place. The property was owned by the Housing Executive and all efforts to rent the house were refused, though it had been vacant for about eight years. Eventually the group, numbering about four as well as myself, decided to squat. This was the beginning of the Dove House Community Resource Centre, which now employs forty workers, in an ACE Scheme.

The first year, like all beginnings of anything, was exciting. More to do with crises, than with setting up and defining the aims of the project. After a while the Housing Executive agreed to give the house to us at a nominal rent. A management committee was appointed and about a year later it was decided to apply for funding under the new media proclaimed ACE Scheme. The management committee, composed of local people, some teachers, and the young people, submitted a proposal to the DED and funding was given for four workers to develop and administer theCentre. Dove House was by now enjoying support from the community and had widened its activities beyond education, to meeting other needs of the community.

In March 1986, the Dove House Centre was officially opened by a Dutch MEP who managed a similiar place in Gronigen in the north of Holland. The aims of the house, providing resources for the people and creating opportunities for work, were now becoming a reality.

The Political Vetting of Dove House How it Began

Early in 1987, a Tenants' Association in Shantallow, a large housing estate on the periphery of the city, had their ACE funding withdrawn for their only paid worker, who happened to be the son of the editor of the local nationalist newspaper. Dove House management committee read this news in the paper and at the subsequent meeting of the management committee, a decision was taken to offer support to the Tenants' Association. A meeting was arranged to discuss the issue and inform people of the background to the Government decision. The allegation that the Tenants' Association could or would be furthering the aims of paramilitary organisations, was at first greeted with amusement and then outrage by the local community. The implications for other community ACE sponsors

provoked alarm and Dove House committee decided to release a press statement condemning the DED decision and demanding that the allegation be withdrawn.

In March, the management committee of Dove House received a letter from the DED stating that their funding for the four ACE workers was also being withdrawn on the same basis as that of the Shantallow Tenants' Association. The management were informed that the funding would cease on the 27 June. The committee immediately wrote to the DED asking that the allegation be substantiated, but received no reply. They then contacted theCentre solicitor and subsequently met with counsel in Belfast, with a view to legal action. They were informed some time later, that legal action was not possible, as the allegation was based on a statement made by Douglas Hurd MP under privilege of the House of Commons. Efforts to obtain a judicial review were equally unsuccessful. It became clear that all attempts to obtain justice or substantiation of the allegation, through the legal process were effectively blocked. In the interim period, the management committee engaged in an intensive public campaign. They also began lobbying MPs in both the Government and Opposition.

The Labour MPs Peter Archer and Stuart Bell took up the case and tabled a question in the House of Commons. (See Appendix VII). Peter Archer compared ACE vetting in the north of Ireland to that of the Tory policy against the GLC in London. The campaign against ACE vetting was supported by Derry City Council, Bishop Edward Daly, Derry Trades Council and many politicians in England. However many ACE sponsors in Derry refused to support the campaign. Dove House received a verbal message from the DED that if their workers were sponsored by the Inner City Trust, one of the largest ACE sponsors in the north west, funding would be restored. The management committee refused to sanction this attempt to impose social control on their project and openly criticised those organisations, who while claiming to be community based, were willing to be used as tools of a state policy of discrimination.

During this time the development officer at Dove House received a death threat from loyalist paramilitaries, which the RUC advised him to take seriously. Dove House management committee raised the issue with Derry City Council. The council decided to send a delegation comprised of the Mayor of the City, the Trades Council, and representatives of the management committee to the House of Commons at Westminister. Peter Archer had tabled a question on the issue during Prime Minister's Question Time. The delegation received some strong support from many Labour MPs and some unionist politicians.

The manager of Dove House travelled to the USA to meet with US politicians as well as Irish American organisations. On her return the management committee decided to hold a festival with the remaining ACE money, so that the community could celebrate their refusal to be intimidated. The festival was held on the 27 June, the day that the funding was withdrawn. It was a day when community consciousness translated into community action. The committee then decided to take the campaign to Europe, and began sending out information packages to Euro MPs. They also invited two Dutch members of the Parliament to visit Dove House to investigate the Government allegation. The visit was arranged for July and the MEP's spent five days talking and meeting with local people. The visit received good coverage in the media.

In mid August, Dove House management committee was informed that the DED had decided to restore the funding for the four workers involved. The fact that this small victory had been achieved by the campaign, was tempered by the refusal of the government to withdraw the allegation, or disclose the source of the information on which it was based. This is still the situation to the present time.

There was thus nothing new about the committee which could have suggested something underhand was taking place in November 1989 which had not been taking place in all the years the scheme was running. If on the other hand the scheme lost funding because of whom it employed, how in the light of fair employment legislation was it to vet its employees? The group felt that it had been treated most unfairly by the NIO and given no explanations or opportunity to clear its name. The good work it did, advising local residents and carrying out decorating and gardening for pensioners, single parents and disabled people was also severely disrupted, causing a loss not just to the Association but the the local community generally. Finally, some of the people involved with the Association were greatly disappointed at the way four other local ACE schemes reacted to the decision to withdraw funding from Glencairn. They did not show much solidarity and in fact took over funding and ACE posts which had been lost by the Community Association.

A representative from Glencairn Community Association was billed to speak at the April Conference at Queen's University about the experiences of the group. However, at the last minute the Association's committee decided against such a move, on the basis that the publicity associated with it could damage their case for getting funding restored. Once again the political vetting policy had shown the genuine fear it could induce in local community groups and, how it could similarly adversely effect the activities in which they could engage.

As a postscript to this it should be pointed out that Glencairn Community Association were one of the first groups to send a letter of support and solidarity to the Irish language group Glór na nGael when it was politically vetted in August 1990.

4

Political Vetting: The Civil Liberties Issues

by Michael Ritchie (CAJ)

The Committee on the Administration of Justice believes that the Government practice of what is known as political vetting is neither acceptable nor justifiable.

Natural Justice

The procedure seems in contravention of all notions of natural justice:

1. No evidence has been produced to justify the Government's claim of vetted groups "improving the standing and furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation". Correct procedure would be to prosecute individuals for contravention of section 21 of the Emergency Provisions Act (1978) (EPA) and section 10 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).

2. There is no possibility of appealing the decision. Requests for further information or reconsideration simply evoke a copy of Douglas Hurd's statement in the House of Commons.

3. One suspects, in fact, that parliamentary privilege has been relied upon to smear groups who can thereafter have no comeback. In other words, there is no evidence that the Government can produce which would stand up in a court of law.

4. We are therefore into the area of discrimination on the grounds of perceived political opinion of the groups affected. This of course is in contravention of many pieces of legislation and many international conventions of human rights.

Legal Avenues

On the face of it there may be a number of legal avenues through which the practice of political vetting might be challenged. These include domestic, British and European avenues. The difficulty is of course the expense involved, added to the fact that the Government claims that the special situation in Northern Ireland requires special measures. The legal possibilities were listed by lawyers at the public inquiry held in Conway Mill in May 1988:

1. Executive discretion has to be exercised reasonably, otherwise it is unlawful. If a community initiative is penalised simply because it is sited in particular premises and a similar community initiative elsewhere receives funding, unreasonableness surely arises. It may therefore be possible to seek judicial review in the High Court.

2. The Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 prohibits, with certain exceptions, political discrimination. Legal advice should be sought.

3. The DED's policy on ACE funding would seem to be discriminatory and therefore in contravention of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989. Legal advice should be sought.

4. The possibility of complaining to the Parliamentary Ombudsman has already been tried (by Conway Mill) and failed.

European Options

As far as European standards are concerned, it must be remembered that all possible domestic remedies must be attempted before taking a case to Europe is possible. Thus the High Court, the Court of Appeal (Northern Ireland) and the House of Lords may have to be appealed to. Bearing this in mind, and the consequent time and cost involved, the following articles of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) seem relevant:

1. Article 6(1) of the European Convention of Human Rights provides that; "everyone is entitled to a fair hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal".

2. Article 14 prohibits political and other discrimination.

Conclusion

In conclusion, CAJ feels strongly that the groups who have been subject to political vetting have been unjustly treated. In attempting to redress this unjust treatment, they deserve the support and solidarity of other community organisations.

5

Conference Discussion and Recommendations

1. Workshop Discussion

After hearing the contributions from the main speakers, the conference broke up into smaller workshops to discuss the issues raised and to come up with possible recommendations. In particular the workshops were asked to consider three main questions.

> Why does political vetting take place and what forms does it take?
>
> What effect does political vetting have on community work? For example what is the effect on local leadership in a community or what effect does it have on divisions within and between local communities? Also, what effect does political vetting have on the activities or the issues that community groups get involved in?
>
> How can political vetting be challenged?

A synopsis of the undergoing discussions around these three questions is provided below.

Why does political vetting take place and what forms does it take?

One general point raised in relation to this question was that political vetting was aimed more at trying to limit the influence of Sinn Fein within local communities rather than an attempt to control paramilitary influences per se. However, some people felt that the motivation behind political vetting went much wider than that, having an underlying general social control function. Thus it should be seen more in terms of the Government's attempts to control independent collective action. In the unstable political climate existing in Northern Ireland independent collective action by community groups, particularly by those groups calling for social change, was seen as threatening the power and control of the State.

For some, the Government's attitude towards community groups in Northern Ireland was really no different to that towards groups in Britain. The increasing scrutiny role of the Charity Commissioners in England into the alleged political activities of charitable bodies was cited as an example of this. There was a feeling among some that the Government had a great antipathy to community-based groups in any event since they suggested a need for a bottom-up approach to the control and organisation of power in society - a suggestion which those at the top looking down often viewed with suspicion.

Also public funding was always based on some sort of criteria which involved political considerations. Governments wanted to ensure that public money was not used in a way which made their own political objectives harder to achieve. One suggestion was that the recent Scrutiny Report on the funding practices of Government Departments illustrated this point. This suggested that Government funding policies should all be streamlined to fit in with the Departments' and

thus the Government's objectives. The criteria of European funding programmes was also mentioned. Only programmes which fitted in with the European Community's current priorities received funding. Therefore political vetting in the general sense took place in terms of what a government was prepared to fund and in terms of what it felt was necessary to ensure social control.

What was different in Northern Ireland terms was that the 'emergency situation' often enabled the Government to use cruder methods of social control to keep potential opposition groups and communities under control than would have been acceptable in Britain. Thus under the cover of the threat of paramilitary groups the Government could deny public funding to community groups, which it viewed as a threat.

In this view the Douglas Hurd policy of political vetting was simply a particular form of social control, and a particular part of an overall state social control strategy.

Representatives from the Republic of Ireland also argued that political vetting was now taking place there but it was more covert. The Government there was also concerned about some groups and used the excuse of Sinn Fein involvement to stigmatise and marginalise some groups. Whether or not Sinn Fein was involved or involved significantly in them. The State's campaign against the Concerned Parents against Drugs groups was cited as an example. Here local communities were taking decisions themselves and taking collective action against the drugs problem However, since they were providing an alternative to the State's activities on this problem, they were viewed as a threat.

Both in the north and south of Ireland there was a feeling that the State needed the co-operation of the churches and the often more conservative voluntary and community groups in order to ensure social control. Such groups were viewed as partners by the State and in return for funding they engaged in "softer" activities more in line with Government thinking than the campaigning groups. By promoting these groups and not others the Government was also affecting the local leadership in an area - possibly replacing it with one less likely to challenge the Government.

What effect does political vetting have on Community Work?

Participants - many of whom had experienced the effects of political vetting either directly or indirectly - mentioned a whole range of effects of vetting on community work.

Groups which had been vetted had witnessed the loss of their funds and a subsequent decrease in activities in which they could usefully engage in their local communities. They had also found themselves isolated and marginalised because others were afraid to be seen to be associated with such groups. In some cases this was because people had felt that there could be "no smoke without fire". In others, people simply had been afraid that they too would be labelled as "paramilitary supporters" if they associated with or continued to support a group that had been vetted. On a practical level the denial of public funding often meant that a group could not get any funding anywhere else. Other Government Departments were by and large prevented from offering support - often to their great dismay - because of a general black-listing of the group by the NIO in all Government Departments. Since the suspicion was now created in the public's mind that maybe the group wasn't bona fide, this meant the group often had problems raising funds from the general public, local private businesses and from charitable trust funds. The group also found it difficult to get new members

and began to lose old ones. People were afraid to be linked with it. As a result the group would sometimes simply disappear.

One community association in Twinbrook which had been vetted saw a lot of its work in the area come to a halt because the loss of ACE workers limited what it could now do. In particular its Welfare Rights Advice Centre which had at one time dealt with about 3,000 complaints a year had to be closed down due to lack of resources. It was pointed out that at one time the Twinbrook Community Association had been one of the most active, most efficient, and most effective in the whole of Northern Ireland. After it became vetted it became virtually moribund. The attempt of the State to try and change local leadership in the estate from a radical to more establishment orientated one could be seen by the fact that the local Church ACE scheme eventually increased in size after the community associations was stopped. This illustrated a general view made by many participants at the workshops. Increasingly, more radical groups were finding it more difficult to survive, being denied funding, while the more establishment oriented groups like the Church were being actively promoted by the State in local areas by funding policies. This in turn distorted community development in many areas. An alternative community sector was being created and fostered by the State - safer ACE sponsors were being imposed with no community base and no accountability to that community. One participant argued that in reality the State was now in partnership with itself at community level.

Most participants felt that the activities of many groups, whether vetted themselves or not, had been affected by the general vetting policy. The normal spectrum of diverse community activity ranging from campaigning to innovation to straightforward service provision which was thrown up by community development had been grossly distorted. Now work was being dictated by what the State narrowly defined as being "acceptable". Service provision was now the order of the day for groups in many areas. Much of the work overlapped that already done successfully by others. In particular groups were now no longer responding to local peoples needs but to the dictates of the State. This also meant that projects could now end up becoming power structures for a privileged elite in local communities rather than acting as genuine vehicles for community concerns. Such privileged elites, in particular the church, monopolised the funding and were thus able to submerge other groups and even use their ideas for their own benefits.

One worrying aspect of political vetting in the North was that the labelling of a group as "paramilitary supporters" could set the members of that group up as legitimate targets for political assassination. It was claimed that at least one man who had had business associations with the politically vetted Conway Mill had been killed as a result and a worker in Dove House had received death threats. Others who had been publicly associated with particular vetted groups felt particularly vulnerable.

In general, it was felt that political vetting diverted energies away from community work and from the original objectives of a project. Through its use the Government was attempting to set the agenda for community groups, moderate their activities and direct them down certain paths. This was in turn preventing the generation of creative, positive ideas and actions within local communities.

This in turn had led to a loss of morale among community activists in many areas. There was a feeling of "what's the point of being interested in community development?" Unless the community's ideas fitted in with the State's they could not be brought anywhere. There was also a feeling that many projects which were funded and had now lost the original focus of their work and had become simply tools fitting onto the Government's own agenda.

The indirect affect of political vetting on community work was discussed at great length by all the workshops. There was a general belief that this indirect effect created self-vetting by local groups. Vetting also created competition between groups with some groups trying to secure the funding lost by others. Often much work became focused on vetting itself. Projects began to vet themselves on the basis of what might or might not be acceptable to the funder - either in terms of their activities or their management committees. This in turn led to attempts by groups to distant themselves from some individuals or groups in their own communities. Groups needed to "prove" that they were "respectable" or "safe", and they tried to distant themselves from associations which might damage this image. In the case of Dove House, for example, it was argued that whenever they got their funding returned to them they were so afraid of losing it again that they went to great extremes to distant themselves from any activities or groups which might have "tainted" them. This in effect limited their ability to do much in their local community, since it meant they had to ignore some issues of importance to their community as well as some sections of that community.

Another example of this dissociation was seen in the case of Lá(the Irish newspaper) and the Irish school Gaelscoil na bhFál. Both these projects were told they would not receive any funding while they remained in Conway Mill so they took a decision to move out. In many cases groups also became afraid to apply for funding in the first place because they are afraid of being labelled, if they happened to be vetted by the funding body concerned.

Self-vetting had also been seen in the case of groups refusing to allow members of Sinn Féin on to their committees, or refusing to publicly support campaigns of groups already vetted, or even refusing to attend public meetings in places like Conway Mill, in case they too become vetted. Groups felt they couldn't be outspoken on certain issues - even issues which might not be seen to be overtly political.

One community association which had organised a campaign against road building in their area had a spokesperson who was also involved in a youth project. In order not to endanger funding for the latter, she had to issue statements regarding the roads campaign, using her maiden name.

Self censorship of this sort had also been experienced by some southern groups. In Abbeyleix for example, it was claimed that a residents' association was told by the local council that their campaigning for better repairs and services would be ignored until they got rid of a Sinn Féin member on the Committee. They did so. In the Republic of Ireland however, vetting was much less overt. Internal, self censorship, seemed to be much more common.

In general the paronoia surrounding vetting led to and reinforced suspicion in local communities, enhanced divisions, prevented local alliances from forming. The threat of vetting therefore influenced the way groups represented their constituencies in terms of public statements, activities and general organisation. It also prevented groups and individuals from feeling free to comment on Government policies.

One positive aspect mentioned about political vetting was that it did give vetted groups the opportunity to stand back and analyse where they stood ideologically and what the real needs of their local community were - untainted by Government funding which invariably created a blinkered view of the world for funded bodies. The problem of course was that without funding there was little they could do to pursue such needs.

Another positive aspect of vetting which was mentioned was that it enabled groups to come together, such as at the present conference. Groups then could

mutually support one another because they realised that they could be next. The problem with that of course was that only a minority of community groups were prepared to come together in that way.

How can the political vetting be challenged?

Generally speaking there was quite a lot of demoralisation amongst the smaller community groups when it came to the question of how political vetting should be challenged. For many of them there was a feeling that such a campaign, if reactivated, must be led by the major voluntary organisations, since they had the resources and staffing and influence to maintain such a campaign in a way which would not be possible for the smaller under - resourced grassroots bodies. There was a feeling that the large bodies had a responsibility to do something and up to now had not lived up to that responsibility, instead they had simply paid lip service to opposing political vetting. There was some feeling that such bodies including the churches needed to be embarrassed into doing something.

There was also a feeling that many within the larger bodies would be sympathetic to an anti-political vetting campaign. However, they needed to be made aware about the issues, and an awareness raising campaign could be important in that respect. The trade unions too, needed challenged on what they were doing about the issue.

Networking was regarded as being very important by some participants. The feeling was that groups who had been politically vetted needed to feel as though they were not alone. Support mechanisms needed to be provided for such groups - both to help with morale and also in practical ways with resources.

Networking could be extremely important, both in alleviating the direct effects of vetting, as well as in formulating appropriate responses. It should take place at city, regional and national level. The Brownlow experience was mentioned as potentially providing useful insight into countering isolation and encouraging participation through joint funding applications. The Dove House campaign was also mentioned as being useful in providing insights into the use of lobbying. There was a feeling that networking could help with the transmission of ideas about how other campaigns had been run, what they had achieved and why they had failed.

Some felt that in any lobbying campaign on this subject the best way to involve as many groups as possible was to treat the issue as a civil liberties issue rather than one of social control by the State.

For most, work was required at a number of levels - informing, convincing and mobilising people on the ground about the issue as well as challenging those in power.

Most participants agreed that there was a need to obtain hard factual data on who exactly had been vetted and the effects vetting had on vetted groups and on community work generally. Research was badly needed. There was also a need to analyse the policy implications of vetting. Once this data was obtained there was a need to facilitate the transmission of this information. One participant suggested making a video for distribution in Britain, Europe and the US. Alternative sources of funding needed to be investigated. Groups that are vetted needed to pressurise the trade unions to take action on behalf of the workers who had lost their jobs.

Possible legal avenues also had to be explored including the possibility of taking a test case through the British courts, through a Fair Employment Tribunal or through the European courts.

Section 3

POLITICAL VETTING: THE CURRENT POSITION

6

The Political Vetting of Glór na nGael

by Féilim Ó hAdhmaill

In August 1990, the latest community group to be hit by the Government's overt political vetting policy was the Irish language umbrella group - Glór na nGael.

Glór na nGael (meaning the voice or language of the Gael) is an all-Ireland Irish language competition established in 1961 by a group of Irish speaking priests, including the late Cardinal O'Fiaich. It aims to encourage local geographical communities to set up locally based committees representative of a broad range of community, business and voluntary sector interests to promote the speaking of Irish in everyday life. Each year prizes are awarded to the committees doing the most to promote Irish in their area.

In 1982, as the Irish language revival was lifting off in West Belfast, a Glór na nGael committee was set up there also. Initially much of its work was confined to campaigning for rights for Irish speakers. It was particularly prominent in the campaign to erect Irish street signs during the 1980's. The campaign, organised and paid for by local residents, was in protest at the 1949 Public Health and Local Government Act which forbids the erection of street signs in any language other than English. The committee met with various Government Ministers and politicians to further its campaign, organised pickets and marches, met with language enthusiasts from Scotland and Wales and organised public seminars.

Glór na nGael was also particularly prominent in Irish language education. It organised the presentation of Irish language groups at the Belfast Urban Area Plan Inquiry in 1988 calling for land to be specifically zoned for the mushrooming Irish language schools in the city. It was also very prominent in the broad based and largely successful campaign organised by language groups against the Mawhinney education proposals which threatened to reduce even further the status of the Irish language in the Northern Ireland education system - to one of a lower status than French or German . As part of this campaign Glór na nGael produced a poster with the slogan "Hands off our language".

It was clear to most observers that the Minister for Education , Brian Mawhinney was particularly annoyed by the energetic way in which the campaign was promoted. In fact some observers believe that the political vetting of Glór na nGael was largely a response by the Government to the committee's success during this campaign. Glór na nGael, in some people's eyes was now being seen as a threat by the State.

Ironically however, in recent years, the Glór na nGael committee's emphasis had shifted more from campaigning to service provision. In the mid 1980s Glór na nGael had set up an ACE scheme and this had grown slowly to incorporate twenty-one workers. Much of its work by the late 1980's was concentrated in organising and providing resources for seven out of the eight Irish nursery schools in Belfast and in helping out the second Irish primary school - none of which received any statutory funding. Glór na nGael was also particularly active in promoting the speaking of Irish outside West Belfast and amongst people from all sections of the community. For example it organised a series of seminars on the Irish language and Irish classes at the Ulster People's College in Belfast aimed specifically at the Protestant community.

The work of the West Belfast Glór na nGael committee was recognised throughout by the awarding each year since 1982 of various prizes in the Glór na nGael competition. It was twice awarded the title of the best Glór na nGael committee in Ireland. Largely as a result of its work, West Belfast was dubbed "the Irish language capital of Ireland" by the Irish magazine **Agus.** The late Cardinal O'Fiaich talked of hearing more Irish in West Belfast than in Foxrock near Dublin. In a letter of accreditation which he wrote for one of the Glór na nGael committee who was visiting the US on a fundraising tour in March 1989, the Cardinal wrote:

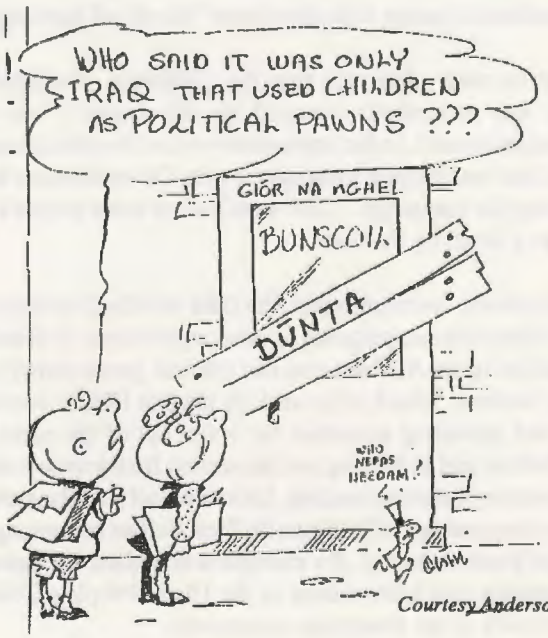
> "the "active promotion" of the Irish language is particularly necessary in Northern Ireland because of Government neglect. In recent years a popular movement for the wider use of Irish has become very widespread.... in Belfast".

He added that the West Belfast committee of Glór na nGael "deserves every support". The committee was also praised on a visit to its offices by the Dublin Minister for the Gaeltacht, Pat "The Cope" Gallagher, in March 1990. Finally, in relation to its cross community work the University of Ulster lecturer, Rosalind Pritchard wrote in the Summer issue of the academic journal **Teargeolas**:

> "One body which attempts to promote Irish as the cultural heritage of all sections of the northern community is Glór na nGael ..... the Belfast branch of the organisation has resolutely pursued a policy of linguistic ecumenism. In June 1989, an Irish language seminar was held jointly by Glór na nGael and the Ulster People's College; the success of the venture owed much to representation by the Protestant community".

Small wonder that the political vetting of Glór na nGael was to cause so much widespread concern.

Glór na nGael's funding predominantly came from a £90,000 annual grant from the Government's Training and Employment Agency, for the provision of an ACE training scheme (the Training and Employment Agency took over responsibility for running ACE schemes from the DED in April 1990). The ACE scheme enabled the group to employ a manager andtwenty trainees from among the long term unemployed, providing them with skills, experience and confidence as they provided Irish language services to the nurseries and other classes.



Courtesy Andersonstown News

On Saturday 25th August, one of the Glór na nGael committee visited the office and discovered a short letter from the Training and Employment Agency informing them that the funding from the ACE scheme would terminate on 31st August 1990. The letter dated 23rd August, gave no reason for the decision (see Appendix X) other than to say that it was due to the policy set out in the Hurd statement of 27th June 1985, a copy of which was enclosed. The letter did not have the name of the sender on it nor any signature except for an illegible squiggle. A second letter was then received dated 24th August, this time from Cecil Graham the head of Community Projects Branch (ACE) of the Training and Employment Agency confirming the initial decision and informing the committee that the Agency was now informing the ACE workers about the decision (see Appendix XI).

The decision to politically vet Glór na nGael caused widespread uproar. Support was received from right across the political spectrum. The issue was raised at the Anglo-Irish Conference and community and civil liberties groups joined in the demands for the decision to be rescinded and the whole political vetting policy to be reviewed.

Calls have also come from across Europe and the USA. Mayor Flynn of Boston adding his voice to the campaign along with the Celtic League and the International Council on Social Welfare.

In October, Glór na nGael was planning a series of public meetings in all the major cities and towns throughout Ireland. The whole affair appeared to cause great embarrassment to the Government which appeared to have bitten off more than it could chew in taking on Glór na nGael. Further embarrassment followed when it was made known that the RUC had actually given permission to Glór na nGael to carry out a street collection in Belfast city centre and were sticking by that decision. Clearly the RUC did not believe Glór na nGael had paramilitary links. Clearly, also, the political vetting decision had been taken not for security reasons, as has always been claimed in the past, but for political reasons.

Up to this point, no politically vetted group had ever made a legal challenge via a judicial review. This was because of the costs involved and the fear of the further public attention such a case would bring on a group. Now Glór na nGael was considering taking such a case, provided it could raise the necessary funds, with a possible follow up case in Europe if that failed.

The political vetting of Glór na nGael brought the whole issue of political vetting back into the agenda of debate. It also enabled groups from right across the community to come together in opposition to the policy in a way which had not been possible in the past (see for example Appendix XII).

The fact that Glór na nGael was one of the major Irish language groups in North Ireland was of particular importance. For many the vetting was an attack on their cultural heritage and identity. The fact that Glór na nGael was a member of NICVA - the major umbrella organisation for the voluntary sector in Northern reland - and the workers were members of the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE), one of the largest public sector trade unions, was also very beneficial. So too, was the fact that Glór na nGael had widespread cross-community and cross political links and was widely respected. Few people believed that it was linked with any paramilitary grouping. The fact that it was primarily involved in children's education appeared to make the Government suggestion ridiculous.

A number of reasons have been put forward as to why Glór na nGael was politically vetted. One suggestion is that the government made a mistake in that it really believed that Glór na nGael was a front for Sinn Féin. This is based on

the knowledge that at one time a prominent Irish language activist who was also a Sinn Féin councillor had been prominent on the committee. If this was the case however, it showed very poor intelligence on the Government's part since this person had left the committee three months previously. It also does not explain why it took the Government so long to act if this was the problem since the Sinn Fein member had been a founder member of Glór na nGael in 1982 and had been active on the committee right up until early 1990. Of course, if this was a case of bad intelligence on the part of the Government why then did it not admit its mistake and rectify the situation immediately? Other suggestions however put forward for the Government's rationale may be closer to the truth. One of these suggests that rather than wanting to attack a committee with a Sinn Féin member on it the real reason for the vetting was to curb the independence of the Irish language movement. The political vetting of tenants' associations and so on in the 1980s had curbed the independent actions of many such groups. Now some felt it was the turn of Glór na nGael, particularly as the Government had now also recently established its own Irish language body - Iontaobhas Ultach. According to this view the Government did not want to destroy the Irish language movement but simply bring it under its control. Glór na nGael as one of the major independent language groups in Belfast was seen as frustrating this strategy.

Another view suggested that the Minister for Education, Brian Mawhinney, was still annoyed at Irish language groups over the successful campaign waged by them against his education proposals. The Government thus was accused simply of seeking revenge when it picked out for political vetting one of the few independent Irish groups to receive any state funding.

Whatever the Government's rationale for the vetting of Glór na nGael, it is quite clear that both the specific Glór na nGael decision and the policy in general are wrong. The political vetting of groups based on evidence and accusations which they are never told about and thus can never defend themselves against is an attack on the civil liberties of individuals and on the freedom and independence of the whole voluntary sector in Northern Ireland.

7

Community Groups which have been politically vetted by the NIO

It is difficult to obtain an accurate list of all community groups which have been politically vetted, for a number of reasons.

First of all there are the groups which have had funding of some sort withdrawn from them. Many of these often refuse to publicise their case because of the fear of others knowing that they have been vetted. They do not want the stigma and/ or they do not wish to be targetted for political attack or assassination. NUPE, the public service union which has been particularly active since the vetting of Glór na nGael - many of whose ACE workers were also NUPE members - has issued a list of thirteen community groups which it claims have been politically vetted (see Table 2). This list includes at least five groups which exist or existed in unionist areas of Belfast, suggesting that vetting effects all sections of the community. NUPE claims that this list is one which was sent to all statutory agencies to warn them not to fund such groups. As such, it is in effect, a blacklist. However, the NUPE list is not itself complete. TheWorking Party itself has been able to discover a number of other groups which have been politically vetted which are not on the list. Also the NIO has claimed according to the BBC (September 1990) that a total of twenty -six community groups have had funding removed in the last five years as a result of the Douglas Hurd statement and that four of these later had their funding reinstated. However, the NIO refuses to issue a precise list of the groups involved or an explanation about how those who got their funding restored went about doing this.

There are also the groups which have not had funding withdrawn but have been denied funding from the start because of political vetting. How do many of these groups know they have been denied funding for this reason? Certainly the NIO's figure of twenty-six appears to refer only to groups which have had funding withdrawn - not those denied funding from the start. During the Working Group's research on this issue, at least two groups were discovered who had not been denied funding but who nevertheless appeared to have been initially politically vetted and then appeared to have the vetting eventually lifted. One group from the Shankill Road in Belfast which was initially apparently denied a Belfast Action Team grant due to political vetting but then eventually succeeded in having the grant paid to them after behind scenes discussions.

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Another group was a Church ACE scheme in West Belfast which was told it could not employ a prisoner who was out of prison on licence because of "Sinn Féin influence on the committee". Ironically, the prisoner was himself instead given permission to join the Glór na nGael ACE scheme which was later political vetted. Thus a Church ACE scheme was more suspect than Glór na nGael on one occasion!!

Despite the ruling over the prisoner the Church scheme mentioned above never lost its ACE scheme nor other statutory grants it was receiving. It also eventually received an "apology" from the NIO along with a statement "clearing it" of political or other involvement. Both these cases particularly illustrate how difficult it is to quantify the number of groups affected by political vetting. In the latter case there was never any publicity, as we suspect is the case with **most** cases of political vetting. Its vetting was also different from that of other groups. Certainly a prisoner was denied permission to join the scheme but no funding was ever withdrawn. Neither was the group informed of the decision about the

prisoner until they contacted the NIO themselves. Even then they never received the letter other groups received containing the Douglas Hurd statement. The allegation was simply given over the telephone by a senior civil servant. Another point about this case which should be stressed is that it may also illustrate the incompetence and lack of intelligence which exists within the NIO and that it is from this basis that political vetting decisions are made.

Another difficulty about quantifying those groups politically vetted concerns those groups which have been told that they will not get public funds, not because of any problem with their own organisation but because of their associations with some other group. Take for example, Gaelscoil na bhFál, the second Irish primary school in Belfast. It never had an ACE scheme or grant aid to start off with but when it began to apply for funding, it was told that no funding would be available to it unless it moved out of the politically vetted Conway Mill. Since there was no where else in West Belfast to go the school remained in the Mill, but can it be regarded as having been politically vetted? According to the NIO there is no problem with the school as a group - it is where it is situated which is the problem. Nevertheless, the school has been made to suffer as a result of the NIO's policy of trying to isolate and marginalise the Conway Mill community project. In the view of the Working Group groups such as the school must be regarded as having been politically vetted because they are being denied funds because of their associations.

The Political Vetting of Community Work Working Group believes that many more than the twenty-six groups listed by the NIO have been adversely affected by the political vetting policy. We also believe that it has had a major detrimental effect on community work and community group activity generally throughout NI - particularly in specific geographical areas of Belfast and Derry where the political conflict has been most pronounced.

Nevertheless, bearing in mind the above limitations the working group has attempted to list those groups which to our knowledge have been politically vetted in the past five years.

Table 2 Community Groups Which Have Been Politically Vetted

The NUPE List

Conway Mill Women' Self-Help Group (July 1985)

Shantallow Ace Housing Scheme

Top of the Hill Tenants Association

York Road Community Advice Centre

Skegoneill, Shore Road and Seaview Environmental Group

Woodvale Community Enterprises

St Matthew's Tenants Association (February 1987)

Mac Airt Nursery School (February 1987)

Glenbryn/Alliance Environmental Group

Westland and District Community Environmental Group

Twinbrook Tenants and Community Association (August 1987)

Dove House (March 1986 - Funding eventually restored)

Glór na nGael (August 1990)

Other groups which can be added include:

Glencairn Community Association and Advice Centre (November 1989)

Lá (Irish Daily Newspaper) (September 1985)

Camera Work Darkrooms, Derry (1987)

A number of groups which did not have funding withdrawn but which were denied initial funding because of where they were situated include:

Gaelscoil na bhFal

Belfast Exposed

8

Conclusion

The Working Group formed after the political vetting conference has concentrated on a number of areas of work. A **press release** was issued directly after the conference and this report was drawn up.

A funding proposal for a **research and monitoring project** has also been drawn up by the group with the aim of employing a worker to investigate the whole issue of political vetting to see how widespread it is and how considerable a factor it is in deciding what types of groups seek and receive funding. The list of politically vetted groups obtained by NUPE, many of which were previously unknown, has reinforced the need for further research. The research worker's job will entail monitoring on an ongoing basis the actual operation of political vetting and liaising with and advising community groups, statutory bodies, the legal profession, Government officials and politicians about the issues involved.

Legal work includes the possibility of a **judicial review** with a group which has been vetted. A judicial review must be taken within three months of the withdrawal of funding and would need the full support of a vetted group. The Committee on the Administration of Justice have offered advice to groups wishing to take a judicial review. The Working Group is also investigating the possibility of taking legal action in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

In terms of **lobbying** it is hoped that the Working Group will be to the fore in a powerful lobby against political vetting in Ireland, Britain, Europe and the USA. One idea being pursued is a possible petition to the European Parliament. It should not be forgotten however, that the European Parliament is not a judicial body: it cannot pass judgement or quash the decisions of national courts. It can, however, organise hearings, ask the President of Parliament to intervene and refer questions to Parliament which can then draw up a motion for a resolution. In essence its power stems more from the embarassment it can cause the NIO and the publicity it can give to this issue at an international level.

Since the political vetting of Glór na nGael, the Working Group has also been active in the campaign for the restitution of funding to this the latest victim of this policy. A **circular** was sent to all those who attended the conference in April 1990 asking groups to write to the Northern Ireland Office (see Appendix XIII). Irish groups and civil liberties bodies in the USA have been contacted seeking support with some success. The Group has also been involved in number of press and radio interviews and has taken part in public meetings. The political vetting of Glór na nGael in particular has made the job of raising awareness about the political vetting issue generally much easier. The involvement of bodies like NUPE has been particularly important. Recently NUPE was to the fore in the launching in Conway Mill of a new community groups' campaign against political vetting and the Working Group is co-operating with this important initiative.

Political vetting must be recognised as an attack on civil liberties. The London based National Council of Civil Liberties - now called Liberty - recently denounced the policy of political vetting in the following way.

> "Given the draconian powers to ban and censor already available to the authorities the use of this measure indicates the Government's

> determination to impose the tightest control on political and cultural life here, by depriving voluntary organisations of the capacity to develop independently and free from Government interference".

As regards Glór na nGael, Mr John Wadham, legal officer of Liberty concluded that:

> "the group has been forced to make representation to Government in order to have its funding restored. This compounds the original injustice, placing the group in an impossible position. It is clearly a ploy by which the Government hopes that the vetting policy itself will escape public scrutiny."

However, political vetting affects much more than the civil liberties of groups which have had their funding removed. It distorts community development in Northern Ireland and creates an atmosphere of fear and paranoia among those involved in community work.

It must be challenged, by community groups, trades unionists, voluntary groups and politicians at every opportunity. We call on the Northern Ireland Office to recant this policy and restitute funding to groups which have been vetted.

If you are interested in taking some action on the question of political vetting it is suggested that you could:

1) Write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Stormont Castle, Belfast BT4 2GD, Northern Ireland;

2) Write to the British Ambassador in your country asking them for further details and asking why political vetting of groups persists;

3) Raise the matter through any representative organisation which might publicise and lobby on the issue.

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See also various issues of **Irish News** throughout September 1990 on the political vetting of Glór na nGael. During that period the Irish News carried coverage of the issue in the form of editorials and articles for thrity-six consecutive days

Abbreviations

ACE Action for Community Employment
BAT Belfast Action Teams
BELB Belfast Education and Library Board
CAJ Committee on the Administration of Justice
CRD Centre for Research and Documentation
DED Department of Economic Development
DENI Department of Education, Northern Ireland
ECHR European Convention of Human Rights
EPA Emergency Provisions Act
ERDF European Regional Development Fund
ESF European Social Fund
FEA Fair Employment Agency
FEC Fair Employment Commission
GLC Greater London Council
ICTU Irish Congress of Trade Unions
IFI International Fund for Ireland
IRA Irish Republican Army
LEDU Local Enterprise Development Unit
MP Member of Parliament
MEP Member of European Parliament
NI Northern Ireland
NIACRO Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
NIC-ICTU Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU
NICVA Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
NIHE Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NIO Northern Ireland Office
NIVT Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust
NUPE National Union of Public Employees
PTA Prevention of Terrorism Act
RUC Royal Ulster Constabulary
SDLP Social Democratic and Labour Party
UDA Ulster Defence Association
UVF Ulster Volunteer Force
WEA Workers Education Association
YTP Youth Training Programme

Glossary of Terms

ACE - Action for Community Employment. Primarily a training programme initiated by the EEC and substantially funded by it. In this, voluntary and community organisations are funded by the Government to set up and run training and workschemes for the long term unemployed. Ostensibly the workschemes should involve work useful to the community.

DED - Department of Economic Development (NI). The Northern Ireland Government Department responsible for running the ACE programme.

Nationalists - A description of those in Northern Ireland who primarily view themselves as descended from the original Irish inhabitants. Overwhelmingly of the Catholic religion they aspire to an end to British rule and a re-unification of the country.

NIO - Northern Ireland Office. The Direct Rule administration of Ministers appointed by the British Prime Minister in London to rule Northern Ireland in the absence of any locally elected administration.

Northern Ireland Training and Employment Agency - A new Government training agency set up in April 1990, it has taken over responsibility for the ACE programme from the direct control of the DED.

Paramilitaries - A term used in particular by the Government to describe various unofficial armed militas which exist in Northern Ireland. Primarily it refers to the IRA (Irish Republican Army) but it is also used in reference to other groups for example the UDA (Ulster Defence Association) which is a loyalist militia

SDLP - The moderate nationalist party which opposes the IRA's struggle but strives for a united Ireland using consitutional methods.

Sinn Féin - A republican political party giving allegiance to the IRA's armed struggle against British rule in Northern Ireland, and striving for a united Ireland. It has a number of elected councillors as well as Gerry Adams, the MP for West Belfast.

Unionists - A description of those in Northern Ireland who primarily view themselves as descendents of the Scottish and English Planters who came to the North East of Ireland in the 17th century. Predominantly Protestant in religion they wish to keep the link between Northern Ireland and Britain.

Appendix 1

Organisations who were Represented at the Conference

123 House
Belfast Women's Centre
Centre for Research and Documentation
City Caring Council
Clondalkin Travellers' Development Group
Committee on the Administration of Justice
Community Development Review Group
Community Workers Co-op.
Conway Mill
Craigavon Unemployed Workers' Committee
Derry Unemployed Workers' Group
Dove House
Dublin Travellers' Education and Development Group
Falls Women's Centre
Gingerbread
Glór na nGael
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
Laois Peace and Justice Group
Lower Ormeau Residents' Action Group
Northern Ireland Community Relations Council
Northern Ireland Council for Travelling People
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
Northern Ireland Council on Disability
Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance
Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust
Oxfam
Peace People
Quaker House, Belfast
Regional Community Development Project
Tenants' Participation Advisory Service
Twinbrook Tenants' and Community Association
Unity Flats Residents Association
University of Ulster
Volunteer Development Resource Unit
West Belfast Community Festival

Appendix II

NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service

27 June 1985

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

The Secretary of State, Rt Hon Douglas Hurd MP, today gave the following written parliamentary reply to Mr John M Taylor (Solihull), who had asked what plans Mr Hurd has to ensure that Government financial support for community activities is not used to foster the aims and objectives of paramilitary interests.

Mr Hurd: "It is the Government's policy to encourage voluntary and community-based activity which has the genuine aim of improving social, environmental or economic conditions in areas of need, and various grant-aid schemes exist for such purposes. However I am satisfied, from information available to me, that there are cases in which some community groups, or persons prominent in the direction or management of some community groups, have sufficiently close links with paramilitary organisati to give rise to a grave risk that to give support to those groups would have the effect of improving the standing and furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation, whether directly or indirectly. I do not consider that any such use of government funds would be in the public interest, and in any particular case in which I am satisfied that these conditions prevail no grant will be paid."

Appendix III

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

NETHERLEIGH
MASSEY AVENUE
BELFAST
BT4 2JP

Telephone 63244

Mrs S Adams
Secretary
Conway Mill Women's
Self-Help Group
Conway Mill
Conway Street
BELFAST

27 June 1985

Dear Madam

CONWAY WOMEN'S GROUP: ACE SCHEME

I refer to the agreement dated 14 February 1985 which provides for grants of up to £84.55 pw to be paid in respect of the employment of 2 ACE workers by your organisation for a period of 52 weeks.

You may be aware that the Secretary of State has recently indicated in Parliament that he believes that there are cases in which payment of grant to some community associations would give rise to a grave risk of directly or indirectly improving the standing and furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation and that in such circumstances he believes that it would not be in the public interest for grants to be paid. I enclose a copy of the Secretary of State's announcement.

I am directed to inform you that the Secretary of State has decided that it is not in the public interest that grant should continue to ~~be paid under the agreement of 14 February 1985.~~ ~~The Department~~ therefore intends to exercise its right to terminate the agreement on three months' notice and accordingly gives you notice that the agreement is hereby terminated with effect from 30 September 1985.

Yours faithfully

Margaret L. Johnston

MARGARET L JOHNSTON (MISS)

Appendix IV

THE SMALL BUSINESS AGENCY
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND.
LEDU House, Upper Galwally, Belfast BT8 4TB Tel. 0232 691031

16th July 1987

Mr G P O'Caireallain,
136 Deramore Avenue,
Ormeau Road,
Belfast
BT7

Dear Mr O'Caireallain,

Your application for financial support towards the setting up of a new business to produce an Irish language newspaper has been passed to me for consideration.

You will be aware that the printing of newspapers was recently withdrawn from the list of activities approved for Standard Capital Grant. This however does not restrict LEDU or indeed the IDB from assisting businesses which may create additional employment within the Province. We are therefore prepared to further consider your application with one proviso which is as follows.

Some time ago we were directed by the Secretary of State that any business project which was set up within the Conway Street Mill should not attract LEDU support. We are honour bound to operate this condition and must, therefore, invite you to consider whether you would wish to set your business up at another location.

I therefore await your consideration of the above point before asking staff to proceed with your proposal.

I look forward to an early reply.

Yours sincerely,

George Briggs,
Area Organisation Manager

GB/cd

CC: Mr D Eynon

Appendix V

INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

PO Box 2000 Belfast BT4 3SA
Tel Belfast 768832

PO Box 2000 Dublin 2
Tel Dublin 780655

Rev Desmond Wilson
Conway Community Development Enterprises Ltd
123 Springhill Avenue
BELFAST
BT12 7QF

8 February 1988

Dear Desmond Wilson

CONWAY STREET MILL
APPLICATION N949

Thank you for your application for financial assistance from the International Fund for Ireland.

Article 3 of the Bilateral Agreement of 18 September 1986 between the Government of Ireland and the Government of the United Kingdom, constituting the International Fund for Ireland, provides that disbursements from the Fund shall be:

> "consistent with the economic and social policies and priorities of the respective governments."

The Board of the Fund has been advised that it would be inconsistent with the policies and priorities of the Government of the United Kingdom to accede to your application. I have therefore been asked by the Board of the Fund to advise you that it cannot support your application.

Yours sincerely

JOHN G HUNTER

Appendix VI

IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE

WITHDRAWAL OF A.C.E. FUNDING

COMMENTS BY THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE.

The NIC.ICTU is opposed to two situations which have become intertwined in relation to the issue of withdrawal of ACE funding.

Firstly, the Committee is opposed to any public funds being diverted to or syphoned off by paramilitary organisations. The Committee's repeatedly stated views on paramilitary activity make this self-evident.

Secondly, the Committee is opposed to situations where funds are withdrawn from organisations against which there are suspicions but no allegations are stated and no evidence produced. It is a basic concept of natural justice that where action of one form or another is taken against an individual or an organisation, then that person or group has a right to know what the 'charges' or allegations are and has the right to challenge them in some judicial or semi-judicial forum.

In any democracy, this right should only be removed in very exceptional circumstances. The NIC does not accept that the presence on a Management Committee of a political activist or well-known public critic of Government is in itself just cause for withdrawing funds from a project.

It would also be wrong to 'black' a project simply on the basis that it shared premises or parts of premises with another 'blacked' organisation. There might however need to be special provisions made on funding to ensure that there is no transfer of funds.

The fact that some organisations (which are not illegal organisations) wish to present a better image by involvement in community projects is not in itself good reason for refusing aid to the community projects themselves.

The present procedures on withdrawing ACE funds, by which sponsors are given no information on the reasons for the withdrawal other than a copy of the Secretary of State's paramilitary statement, contrasts sharply with the procedures for security vetting of public servants.

The NIC suggests the following as a basis for discussion with the Department of Economic Development:

1. If the Minister rules that there is a prima facia case against an organisation of suspected paramilitary links, the organisation should be so informed.

2. The organisation will at the same time be given any particulars such as the nature of the alleged paramilitary links or associations, and be given the chance to clear itself.

3. If the organisation wishes to challenge the allegation, it shall have 28 days in which to do so.

4. If the Minister reaffirms his view that a prima facia case exists, the organisation will be so informed.

5. The Minister may set out such changes as he would require before his decision to halt funding could be set aside.

6. If these changes are acceptable to the organisation, it shall undertake to implement them with a set period.

7. If the organisation wishes to challenge either the Minister's proposed changes or his decision that a prima facia case exists, then the organisation could appeal to the Ombudsman (who already has a role in relation to certain security cases).

Appendix VII

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

EMBARGO: Embargoed until 12 noon, Thursday 5 June 1986

LABOUR PARTY TO QUESTION GOVERNMENT ON UNFAIR PUNISHMENT OF COMMUNITY GROUPS

'Government departments in Northern Ireland are acting as judge, jury and prosecution in punishing community groups for unspecified actions which allegedly help unspecified organisations in unspecified ways', Peter Archer told a group of lobbyists from Northern Ireland today.

Responding to points put to him by a delegation including the Mayor of Derry, the Chair of Dove House Community Resource Centre, and a representative of Derry Trades Council, the Chief Opposition Spokesperson on Northern Ireland expressed his strong support for their campaign to be given evidence to support Government allegations that the activities of Dove House and other affected organisations were directly or indirectly benefitting a 'paramilitary organisation'.

'A growing list of groups including Dove House, the Shantallow Community Centre and the Top of the Hill Tennants Association in Derry, and organisations associated with Conway Street Mill in Belfast, have now been denied ACE funding on these grounds by the Department of Economic Development', Peter Archer said. 'There is evidence to suggest that LEDU and the Department of Education are similarly denying funds to groups. This deprives some of the communities hardest hit by unemployment and economic decline of even further resources. It punishes organisations and individual beneficiaries of Government funding on an apparently arbitrary and unaccountable basis.'

'The Government has refused, for "security reasons", to give any evidence to support its serious allegations. This leaves organisations tarred with the brush of violence without allowing them any chance to defend themselves. It leaves the Government departments looking like the bully-boys of a big brother society. And it violates one of the most basic principles of natural justice,

denying to those concerned even information on why such action is being taken against them.

Peter Archer welcomed the support the delegation had received from the Bishop of Derry, the Derry City Council and the Derry Trades Council. 'A sinister and worrying pattern seems to be emerging', he concluded, 'of punishing community groups for the politics of the communities in which they operate. Is this another way of achieving what the Government did in England to those groups which were dependent for their funding on the GLC and the Metropolitan Authorities? We will seek to raise the matter in the House today and will press the Government to end this illiberal and unacceptable practice.'

For further information or comment contact:

Peter Archer on (01) 219 5173 or (078481) 2292.

GLENCAIRN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION
RECREATION & ADVICE CENTRE

104 FORTHRIVER ROAD · GLENCAIRN · BELFAST BT13

Appendix VIII

21st November 1989

Dear Mr Graham

RE: Withdrawal of Funding for A.C.E. Scheme

I am writing to you in reply t your letter of 17th November, which was followed by a meeting between yourself and the Chairperson and Treasure of Glencairn on Monday 20th November at 4.30pm. Since then a full committee meeting of Glencairn has been held to consider the withdrawal of A.C.E. funding under the aegis of the Home Secretary's Parliamentary Statement of the 27th June 1985. The Committee wishes to make you awa of the upset and deep distress which has been caused by this decision. It was a great shock to be told, after nearly six years of operating the scheme, that funding is being withdrawn. The Committee wishes to make it clear that it intends to contest this decision.
I am writing this letter to lodge an appeal on behalf of the Committee, against the forementioned decision.

The Committee wishes to make the following points in support of this appeal:
The A.C.E. Scheme was started six years ago and initially operated from the Harmony Working Mens Club, as this was then the only space locally available from which to operate the scheme. Realizing that the was a certain stigma attached to these premises, the Committee did its utmost to secure new premises. Two years ago it secured its present premises 104 Forthriver Road, from where the A.C.E. Scheme is now operated. The Committee continued to use Harmony Working Men's Club as a venue solely for its A.G.M., because once again it was the only hall available which would house a gathering of people. At A.G.M.s the Management Committee and officers have always been elected democratically. The Election is open to all members of the Associatio Audited accounts relating to the A.C.E. scheme are presented to this meeting and subsequently forwarded to the D.E.D's A.C.E. branch. To date the validity of these accounts have never been queried.

All A.C.E. positions are advertised locally and in Gloucester House. The Association is an Equal Opportunity Employer and appoints on the basis of a candidate's suitability for a particular job. Candidates are interviewed by a panel consisting of the Committee's Chairperson, a Committee member and an outside person who is interested in the progress of the scheme.

The Committee is concerned about the effect of the loss of A.C.E. funding, not because of the implication for the Community Association but because of the devastating effect that it will have on the local community, which already suffers from a high rate of unemployment, economic and social disadvantages and their associated social ills. Withdrawal of A.C.E. funding will be a bodyblow to an already impoverished and beleaguered community.

Cont'd

While stating clearly that the Association and its Committee do not have or attempt to have links with Paramilitary bodies, the Committee wishes to forcefully make the following point. Paramilitary activity is a fact of life in areas like Glencairn. It is impossible to vet everyone wishing to play a part in the Community Association or applying for employment under A.C.E. People have to be taken on good faith, unless their intentions can be proved to be otherwise.

However given this, what the Committee believes is a fact of life in working class communities in Northern Ireland, because of the possible serious consequences of the withdrawal of funding in the area, the Committee is prepared to make the following concessions:.
If the D.E.D. can outline a means which will ensure that people with paramilitary connections are not employed under A.C.E., then the Committee will operate this method. If any serving member of the Committee is deemed to have paramilitary links, please notify the Committee and they will be asked to stand down. An impartial observer nominated by the D.E.D. is welcome to be a part of the interview panel as a regular part of the Committee's recruitment procedure. This year's G.M. of the Associatiion will be held at 104 Forthriver Road, even ough these premises are not ideal for such an event. Once again the mmittee invites the D.E.D. or any other statutory authourity to send observer's to this event scheduled for December 1989.

To conclude the Committee,wishes to protest in the strongest possible terms about the decision to withdraw A.C.E. funding. It looks forward to having the opportunity to appeal against this decision and puts its side of the story , at your earliest possible convenience.

Yours sincerely

Betty Rice.

BETTY RICE

Appendix IX

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
WHITEHALL
LONDON SW1A 2AZ

Ms B Rice
Glencairn Community Association
Recreation and Advice Centre
104 Forthriver Road
Glencairn
BELFAST

16 February 1990

Dear Ms Rice

Your letters of 21 and 22 November 1989 to the Department of Economic Development about the Secretary of State's decision to withdraw funding from the Association's ACE Scheme have been passed to this office for reply.

The Secretary of State appreciates your concern about the impact of the withdrawal of ACE jobs, and is fully aware of the effect of such a withdrawal in any disadvantaged area. However, you will be pleased to learn that the ACE places in question have been reallocated within the area, and that the projects in operation will be completed. I understand, also, that most of the former employees in Glencairn have secured places with the new sponsors.

As regards the Secretary of State's decision this was, as you know, taken only after very careful consideration and in line with the policy outlined in the Parliamentary Statement of 27 June 1985 by the then Secretary of State, Mr Hurd, a copy of which you have received. It is not possible, however, to enter into discussion in individual cases.

Yours sincerely

STEPHEN POPE

Appendix X

TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT AGENCY

Training & Employment Agency
Clarendon House
9 Adelaide Street
Belfast BT2 8DZ
Telephone (0232) 244300
Fax (0232) 234417

23 August 1990

Ms Noirin Ui Cleirigh
Chairperson
Glor na nGael
West Belfast Committee
145 Falls Road
BELFAST BT12 8AE

Dear Ms Ui Cleirigh

I have been asked to inform you that the Secretary of State has directed that public funds should not be made available to the West Belfast Committee of Glor na nGael in terms of the policy set out in the Parliamentary Statement of 27 June 1985 made by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr Hurd (copy attached).

Accordingly, I must advise you that ACE funding to Glor na nGael (West Belfast Committee) will terminate on 31 August 1990.

Yours sincerely

Appendix XI

TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT AGENCY

Training & Employment Agency
Clarendon House
9/21 Adelaide Street
Belfast BT2 8DJ
Telephone (0232) 244300
Fax (0232) 234417

Ms Noirin Ui Cleirigh
Chair Person
Glor na nGael
145 Falls Road
BELFAST

21 August 1990

Dear Ms Ui Cleirigh

You have already been informed that the Secretary of State has directed that ACE funding to Glor na nGael (West Belfast Committee) will terminate on 31 August 1990.

Community Projects Branch would wish to make alternative plans for ACE workers currently employed in your project to enable them to complete their term of 52 weeks on the programme. I would advise that direct contact will be made with them so that interviews may be held for those who wish to consider the possibility of alternative employment.

Yours sincerely

C W L GRAHAM
Community Projects Branch

Appendix XII



As discussed at the last Forum meeting I now give you some further information on the subject of political vetting of community groups in Northern Ireland. Please bring this to the attention of your committee and see if they wish to add their voice to the protest.

Over the past few years, fourteen groups which had ACE workers have had their funding withdrawn because of an accusation by the Northern Ireland Office of paramilitary involvement, and in no case has the NIO offered any further explanation or evidence to substanciate their accusations. This in effect means that ACE workers have lost their jobs and been publicly charged with paramilitary connections (which could endanger their lives) and have no right of appeal. The work previously being carried out by the ACE workers suddenly ceases, leaving many people, ie playgroups, elderly and disabled, without the support they had previously been receiving.

Whilst this has so far only affected one community group in the Lisburn Borough so far, it could affect others within the next year.

A working party involving representatives of NICVA, the Committee for the Administration of Justice and the Centre for Research and Documentation has been set up to produce a report on Political Vetting and this should be published shortly. In the meantime, all concerned groups are asked to lend their support to the current outcry against political vetting by writing to the Secretary of State or raising the issue in the media.

Below is a list of ACE groups who have had their DED funding withdrawn.

Glencairn
Conway Womens Self-Help Group
Shantallow Housing Scheme
Top of the Hill Tenants' Association
York Road Community Advice Centre
Skegoneil, Shore Road and Seaview Environmental Group
Woodvale Community Enterprises
Glor na Ngael
St Matthews Tenants' Association
Mac Airt Nursery School
Glenbryn/Alliance Environmental Gro
Westland and District Community and Environmental Group
Twinbrook Tenants and Community Association
Dove House

Appendix XIII

Political Vetting and Community Work Working Group

4 September 1990

Dear Colleague

The latest case of political vetting against the Irish language group - Glor na nGael - illustrates once again the continuing need for the establishment of a well organised lobby to strive for the ending of this policy which is having such a detrimental effect on community development and voluntary action in Northern Ireland.

In April 1990 the Community Workers' Co-op, in association with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, organised a well attended conference on 'Political Vetting' at Queen's University. One of the concerns raised on the subject was that not only did political vetting directly affect those groups who lost funding, but it also indirectly affected other groups in the areas in which such vetting was particularly prevalent. It created an atmosphere of near paranoia, discouraged groups from engaging in any sort of campaigning act - even on rather innocent housing/community issues - and thus seriously undermined local attempts at community development.

At the conference a working group was established to consider some of the many recommendations put forward. Included on this are representatives of NICVA, the Committee for the Administration of Justice (CAJ), Community Workers' Co-op, and the Centre for Research and Documentation. Since the conference this group has been working on a Report on Political Vetting and this is expected to be published within the next few weeks. The group has also been investigating the possibility of employing a research worker to conduct research on the issue and also the possibility of taking some sort of legal action on the matter. More news about this work will be circulated when it becomes available. In the meantime the working group is calling on all concerned individuals and groups to lend their voices to the current outcry against political vetting and to stand united against a policy which debilitates community development and infringes civil liberties. In particular we call on you to write to the Secretary of State voicing your concern and/or raise the issue in the media.

If you would like to find out more about the issues involved in political vetting or would like to help in any way, you can contact the working group. NICVA, 127 Ormeau Road, Belfast BT7 1SH, tel: (0232) 321224, fax: (0232) 438350.

In April 1990 the Community Workers' Co-op and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action organised a very well attended, broad based conference at Queen's Universiity to discuss issues arising from the Government's policy of political vetting and it's effect on community work. It was quite clear from the conference that the effects of political vetting were much wider than those dozen or so groups directly penalised. This is primarily a report of the conference but also includes an update of the latest victim of this policy the Irish language group Glór na nGael.

Price £2.00