

Just News

Human Rights in Northern Ireland

CAJ's 25th Anniversary – a founder member's recollections

The editor's request for this article was to reflect on CAJ's achievements - but you will find these in order and in detail in the Annual Reports; at least that is where I found them. CAJ's biggest achievement is the fact that it has survived for 25 years and grown in strength, in credibility and in self-belief during that time. Its members come from all walks of Northern Irish society, all ages and religions, bound by a common quest – to work for a just and peaceful society where the rights of all are protected. There is no money, no fame nor fortune to bind them to this quest. The quest endures when its effects are ignored.

It all started for me, amongst others with an invitation to attend a public meeting, chaired by Lord Gardiner on the 13th June 1981 at the Students Union at Queens University. A whole day was spent discussing issues such as the use and abuse of the Diplock legislation, the treatment of prisoners held without trial – a new form of internment, the abuse of the legal system, the confessions obtained under duress, convictions obtained on the very dubious evidence induced from others, and the role of the judiciary and legal practitioners in criminal proceedings.

Theory or party politics did not feature that day. Speakers had but one theme however different their story - in a word - injustice. With so many topics raised for discussion, it was resolved to set up a Committee to consider the best way forward. No special qualifications were required to join this Committee save to have the ability to distinguish right from wrong and the courage to speak out.

The day ended with Lord Gardiner setting off in his car for the airport. Something fell off the bottom of the car with a clang. It was rumoured to be a bomb. Suffice to say it didn't go off, so we will never know. We can just be thankful that no ill befell us – as it would have tarnished the day and put an end to CAJ on the evening of its birth!

CAJ started to meet with regularity at the Peace House on the Lisburn Road in Belfast. None of us were experts in emergency legislation, we had to learn from the beginning and where necessary, bring in outside experience to guide our path. We had no money but we realised that this was

an urgent necessity and it took us a few years to learn the "art" - a good few years to be exact. But meanwhile we worked on individual circumstances, domestic campaigning, lobbying nationally and internationally, publishing and organising educational events. The original focus was almost entirely on the operation of emergency laws and how police and criminal justice agencies were affected, and this in turn led to the awakening interest in a Bill of Rights.

It wasn't all milk and honey. Although we took no position on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and were opposed to the use of violence for political ends, we were often looked on with suspicion. As time developed and our membership remained drawn from across the community, CAJ was presented in 1998 with the Council of Europe Human Rights Prize.

There was so much work done that it is hard to believe that we could have enjoyment as well. There were parties, pub sessions, arguments, even music and song. There were meetings which would start half an hour early so that all the serious business was conducted before I could arrive, even if I was late. And then there were the annual trips to Peter Tennant's home, half way up a mountain near Ballycastle. These trips were to party and this we did.

CAJ is now in new young hands, but the theme is still the same. Thank you Martin O'Brien; thank you Maggie Beirne, Liz McAleer and all whose full names I, in my old age, have forgotten.

CAJ was and is a great experience. Long may it remain.

Donall Murphy

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Diplock Consultation – Smoke and Mirrors?

In August 2005, following the IRA's statement formally ending its armed campaign, the UK Government announced a programme of security normalisation. This included a commitment to repeal all counter-terrorist legislation specific to Northern Ireland by 31 July 2007, 'subject to an enabling environment'. As part of this normalisation effort, the Government has issued a consultation paper regarding the future of the Diplock Court system in Northern Ireland.

The introduction of the Diplock non-jury system followed the report of a commission (chaired by Lord Diplock) in December 1972, which recommended that non-jury trials be introduced in Northern Ireland "during the emergency" for so-called 'terrorist' offences. It argued that trials could be subject to perverse acquittals (due to jury prejudice), and intimidation of jurors. It also recommended easier admissibility of confessions to enable convictions solely on the basis of a confession.

Current System

Offences tried in the Diplock Court are known as 'scheduled offences'. If a person is charged with a scheduled offence then they will automatically be brought before the Diplock courts. The Attorney General has control to de-schedule a case and uses a non-statutory test to direct that it be tried before a jury. This usually happens if the Attorney General is satisfied that the offence is not connected to the "emergency" in Northern Ireland. The DPP, by issuing a certificate, can direct that scheduled cases be tried before a magistrate. The defendant has to apply to the High Court for bail as this cannot happen in the Magistrates Court.

The Diplock court system has been a source of controversy throughout the conflict, receiving considerable condemnation and repeated calls for its abolition, including from CAJ. However, notwithstanding such controversies and the difficulties with this court system, the Diplock Review (2000) advised on its continuation. The current consultation has already decided that there is a continuing risk and that some form of non-jury trial will continue to be necessary for Northern Ireland.

Proposals

Proposed changes include:

- the introduction of routine criminal record checks to identify disqualified jurors: currently the system requires selected potential jurors to declare whether they are ineligible for jury service. Sometimes the police will carry out criminal record checks but this does not happen in all

situations. The new proposal is that checks will be carried out by the Northern Ireland Court Service through a new Juror Service Centre, aimed at centralising juror administration.

- restricting access to personal juror information and the introduction of guidelines on jury checks: under the current arrangements names, and other personal details concerning of potential jurors are provided to the prosecution and defence. The new proposals seek to keep that information from defence. At present additional juror checks rely on the investigating officers discretion. It is now proposed that guidelines on additional checks be issued to the PSNI and that these checks only be carried out by officers unconnected to the case.

- abolition of peremptory challenge (the right to challenge up to 12 jurors): the abolition of this is intended to limit a defendant's ability to 'pack a jury' in their favour.

- restricting the exercise by the Crown of its right to stand-by: this gives the Crown the right to stand by a juror – which the consultation papers contends is seen to balance the peremptory challenge abolition.

- a range of other jury protection measures, including
 - In some cases that the jury should not be seen from the public areas
 - Separate waiting areas for jury members
 - Provision to ballot jurors by number only
 - To make it a criminal offence to provide juror information without leave of the court.
 - Widening the law of eligibility for jury service to aim to diminish the risk of perverse verdicts.

As mentioned earlier, the non-jury trial system is to stay in place in 'exceptional circumstances'. However, the presumption will be for trial by jury for all offences – which is a reversal of the current system. Using a statutory test (the details of which were not provided), the Director of the Public Prosecution Service will be able to certify cases to non-jury trial right up to arraignment. This decision can be judicially reviewed.

Consultation questions include whether or not public order offences should be included; whether a reference to organised crime should be included, and whether all 'terrorist' organisations should be included or just those specific to Northern Ireland. Generally the majority of cases tried through the Diplock Courts have been specific to Northern Ireland. However, in 2005 a suspected Al-Qaeda sympathiser was tried and sentenced through the Diplock Court. Does this mean that the Diplock court system will now be used more as a tool in the more recent 'war on terror'? Much remains to be seen.

Ita Connolly
Transitional Justice Institute, University of Ulster

Reviewing the Equality Duty

In a presentation for the Equality Coalition a few years ago, Chris McCrudden described the role of the Equality Duty under section 75 (Northern Ireland Act 1998) as being essentially ‘recognition, participation and redistribution’.¹ The Equality Commission, which is charged under the legislation with ‘policing’ the implementation of the equality duty, is currently undertaking a review of its effectiveness that has the potential to enhance the ability of the duties to fulfil this role. (see Just News, May 2006)

There are real issues regarding the effectiveness of the equality duty that need to be answered through this review, including why are ‘high level’ policies seen as exempt from Equality Impact Assessment? And why are consultees not engaging to the extent that they need to be? Why are myths about section 75 being perpetuated, including for example the requirement that a gender equality strategy look at men as well as women, and that section 75 is all about bureaucratic box ticking? The prevalence of such myths is deeply troubling.

There are also some excellent examples of good practice to be found. However, if the review is not carried out in an effective way, there is a danger that the process becomes one of criticism and re-enforcing myths, rather than critical analysis of how to improve effectiveness.

The review is currently being carried out through the commissioning of six separate research tenders, each looking at a distinct aspect of effectiveness. These will produce reports to the Equality Commission who will then consider the next steps.

Next Steps

It is unclear at this point are made for the results of the tenders. The formal position being that we will have to ‘wait and see’ the results of the research. This leaves civil society, asking three questions: First, will the review, in its current form, be able to assess effectiveness? Secondly, what do we want the next stages to look like? And thirdly, what is our role? The third question is the easiest: our role is to do what we have been doing – to engage constructively in the process and act when necessary.

Regarding the current form of the Review, the Equality Coalition was broadly supportive of the terms of reference, especially its emphasis on impacts and outcomes. However,

there were concerns from the start that using a process of tenders, and leaving methodology (especially regarding methods of participation of civil society) up to individual consultants could lead to an unnecessarily fragmented approach rather than the ‘strategic overview of implementation’ that the Commission seeks.

There is also a concern that the resources dedicated to the Review are insufficient. It does not bode well that the tender on impact is written as ‘impact on individuals’ which misses entirely the point of group level inequalities that section 75 was designed to address.

Another, related, problem with the current approach is maybe less tangible – for a review of this type there is a distinct lack of a ‘buzz’ in the air. Most people (but not all) in the sector know it is taking place, but few are talking about it. Or at least not without a weary reference to ‘box-ticking’. This comes back to an earlier concern: if the review is not itself effective it runs the risk of re-enforcing rather than challenging myths.



Which leads to the second question: what next? Without seeing the results of the research or any concrete proposals from the Equality Commission, it is difficult to say. However, it is clear that the research will produce some important data and it will be essential in the next stages to generate that missing buzz by enabling participation in debating the results.

To do this means a serious and extensive piece of work to engage all the players in the process, from ‘those directly affected’ such as children and young people who have (or have not?) been consulted, through to those of us who have been steeped in consultations from the start.

The challenge now is for the Commission to draw together the separate tenders and engage with all those involved to enable a debate within our society on how the equality duty can fulfil its role of recognition, participation and redistribution.

Tansy Hutchinson
Coordinator of Policy and Research
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
 (Member of the Equality Coalition)

(Footnotes)

¹ Comments made at ‘Delivering on Equality’ an Equality Coalition seminar (30th April 2003)

No Progress M

“If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation...want crops without plowing up the ground.... Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

These words of the black abolitionist leader Fredrick Douglass were echoed by William Thompson Jr., Comptroller of the City of New York, during his recent visit to Belfast. Mr Thompson was here at the request of UNISON and CAJ to speak at an “Equality Forum” organised jointly by both organisations. The purpose of the Forum was to highlight a number of issues raised recently in the CAJ report – “Rhetoric and Reality: Equality in Northern Ireland”.

Mr Thompson stated that his office was “especially proud” of its role in working with Nobel Peace laureate and former Irish Foreign Minister Dr. Sean MacBride to implement the MacBride principles. According to Mr Thompson

“The MacBride Principles played a key role in the fight to develop fair employment legislation in Northern Ireland. While we still have a long way to go, we can say that today, through all of our efforts, the workplace is the most integrated sector of society in Northern Ireland”.

Setting the context for the current situation however, Mr Thompson reminded the audience that when the MacBride Principles were proposed, they were denounced by the Thatcher government as “unnecessary, counterproductive and illegal.” Others suggested that in raising issues of fair employment, the Comptroller’s office was sowing the seeds of division and pitting Catholics against Protestants, and that therefore these issues should not be raised.

He pointed out however that nothing could be further from the truth, comparing the MacBride campaign of the 1980s to the courageous decision by African American men and women to challenge segregation on buses, at lunch counters and in public schools during the American Civil Rights struggle. He also pointed out that by the same logic, it would have been unnecessary and counterproductive to turn back the racist and abhorrent system of Apartheid that was the source of unspeakable oppression for generations of black South Africans.

The Comptroller picked up on a theme of the report that a number of media outlets had also covered – namely that growing prosperity has resulted in real change, but that this

change has not reached the most disadvantaged in either the Protestant or Catholic communities.

In relation to employment, as the CAJ report points out, there are still areas of the workforce in which there are significant, and unacceptable levels of inequality and segregation. Nowhere is this more evident than in local government for example, where one can see Councils, such as Carrickfergus and Castlereagh, with workforce levels of Catholic representation in single figures at just under 7% and 9% respectively. In North Down, the Catholic proportion of the Council workforce stands at just over 10%. At the other end of the scale, Protestants make up just under 14% of the workforce of Newry and Mourne District council, while in Derry City Council the Protestant proportion of the workforce is just under a quarter. Indeed, across the public sector as a whole, one can identify significant levels of segregation, both within and across sectors.

In relation to the private sector, again there remain significant problems in terms of under representation. For example, Northern Ireland’s largest employer is Tesco, with 7,731 employees, of whom only 32.9% are Catholic, almost 10% below the figure expected. In Shorts, which has 5,573 employees, just under 15% of employees are Catholic, giving a level of under-representation of almost 30%, while in Charles Hurst, which has 1,021 employees, just over 17% of the workforce is Catholic. It is important to note that under representation in the private sector is not the exclusive preserve of the Catholic community – for example in Seagate Technologies, which has some 1,771 employees, just under 30% of the workforce is Protestant, giving a level of Protestant under representation of almost 30%. Equally however, it is clear that overall, in the private sector, the biggest problem of under representation is experienced by the Catholic community.

What these figures show is that notwithstanding the success of the 1989 Fair Employment Act in addressing workplace inequality, there is much still to do to redress unacceptable imbalances in workforce compositions in both the public and private sectors.

Economic with the Actualité

Without Struggle

Equally, there are significant community inequalities outside the labour market. In particular, the CAJ report focuses on the fact that the much trumpeted “record low levels of unemployment” don’t quite tell the whole story. While there are “only” 32,000 people unemployed, there are in fact an additional 40,000 people economically inactive who want to work. These 40,000 persons are not classed as “officially” unemployed, but nonetheless would fit any “common sense” definition of unemployment.

The unreliability of the “official” unemployment figures means that there are consequential problems with relying on comparisons between the unemployment rates of the two communities. One needs to look at other indicators that cover issues such as economic inactivity. In this context, it is worth noting that the economic activity rates for those of working age for the two communities is 76.4% for Protestants and 67.9% for Catholics. In relation to the proportion of each religion in employment as a proportion of all those economically active and inactive of working age, the figure for the Protestant community is 72.5%, while the figure for the Catholic community is 62.9%.

Perhaps the most revealing of the figures in the report however relates to the issue of workless households. The report shows that the proportion of people living in workless households, after correcting for those in retirement, has remained broadly stable for

Catholics (from 20% in 1997 to 19% by 2004) while the rate for Protestants has increased (from 14% in 1997, rising to 16% by 2004).

What this means in effect is that the benefits that Northern Ireland accrued between those years – the peace dividend in other words – went to those households in which someone was already working. This “middle class” success story has meant that at the bottom rung of the social ladder, there has been a narrowing of the gap between the poorest Protestants and Catholics – based largely on an increase in the proportion of poorer Protestants. While the poorest Catholics are still the worst off, their poorest Protestant counterparts are catching up giving an “equality of misery” at the bottom of the social ladder.

Where does poverty reside?

What the report also shows is that it is no mystery where

the poorest sections of Northern Irish society live. Of the top 20 poorest areas of Northern Ireland, only one, Ballymacarrett, is outside North and West Belfast or Derry. Of the top 50 most deprived areas of Northern Ireland, only seven are outside North and West Belfast, or Derry. Of the next 50 most deprived areas – over half are from North and West Belfast or Derry.

Another serious problem facing the poorest areas of Northern Ireland is, perhaps unexpectedly, housing. In “Belfast 5” housing district (ie the Shankill) the overall average waiting time is just over 12 months, a shocking figure. That is until one considers that the overall average waiting time “Belfast 3” housing district (ie Ballymurphy and Beechmount) is almost 30 months. In other words, the wait for a house on the Catholic side of the Springfield road is two and a half years, compared with one year on the Protestant side of the peace line.

A Shared but Unequal Future?

Perhaps the main problem that the report identifies however is the lack of willingness on the part of anyone in Government to address these problems. Indeed, some pronouncements which champion the success of initiatives like New Deal are misleading – statistics show that New Deal actually increases rather than addresses community inequalities, given that Catholics have lower success rate with the programme than Protestants. In other instances, there is a blatant policy of choosing to manipulate data for short term political expediency – the shameful behaviour around the creation of the Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities is also explored.

The report also shows however that some initiatives such as “Shared Future”, which on the surface are innocuous enough, and may even seem quite positive are particularly problematic given that they are based on a notion that inequality has been addressed and that the only difficulty now relates to intolerance – an intolerance that the poor themselves are largely responsible for holding. “Let them share cake” would appear to be the mantra of Shared Future.

The authors of Shared Future, and indeed all policy makers would do well to consider the findings of “Rhetoric and Reality”. In particular, policy makers need to reconsider their strategy to date which the data in this report shows is essentially based on abandoning areas like North and West Belfast to an “equality of misery” based on competition for a piece of an ever decreasing cake, while the rest of society enjoys the fruits of the peace dividend.

New Beginnings? Human Rights Commissions North and South

The Irish Human Rights Commissions' first term of office came to an end in July 2006. Despite a very difficult start, the Commission made some significant progress institutionally and substantively. Its fourteen members were representative of a wide swathe of Irish society, and reflected a solid mix of backgrounds and expertise.

When the Commission's tenure came to an end, the obvious expectation was that the government would move quickly to ensure that a smooth transition would take place and that there would be no hiatus in the changeover for the Commission's work and its staff members. Unfortunately, the low priority given to human rights enforcement by the current government was reflected in the two month delay which followed in appointing new members. Moreover, some concerns have been voiced about the transparency and fairness of the appointment process, whereby clearly differing modes of application and appraisal applied to sitting members of the Commission and those who might be applying for the first time appointment. These 'due process' concerns should not be lightly dismissed.

The new Commissioners took up office on October 2nd. The appointments are all individuals of high standing and many are known for their work in the human rights field. Ten members of the previous commission were re-appointed. The appointments are positive and clearly augment the capacity of the Human Rights Commission to fulfil its promise as set out in the Good Friday Agreement and in the legislation which created it.

Without detracting from the merits of individual appointments, it is important for the NGO community to reflect on the diversity and representativeness of the Commission. Notably, there is a complete absence of representation on this body for travellers, new minority groupings in Ireland as well as the complete absence of persons of colour. No crude calculations should be made that give 'seats' to certain groups on the Human Rights Commission, but when the groups and individuals who experience the most discrimination in our society are not represented at the fora that 'speak to' their rights there is a gap of representation. Thus, the danger is that 'experts' come to speak for those who are marginalised, further compounding their exclusion and absence from the public and legal spaces which speak to and decide about their status and place. It is to be hoped that the new Commission will have the 'voice' to recognise this, and make its work relevant, meaningful and inclusive to those whose human rights it has the duty to protect and advocate for.

(NIHRC), the Chief Commissioner and Commissioners appointed last summer are now just over a year into their posts. It has certainly been a busy year for the Commission – they consulted on and produced a new Strategic Plan to guide their work for the next three years; made an important intervention in the judicial review of the decision to convert the Billy Wright Inquiry to one under the Inquiries Act (arguing that the Act is in fact incompatible with Article 2 of the ECHR and should be struck down); and published an excellent report into the role of the inquest system in investigating deaths by lethal force in Northern Ireland.

However, the past year saw little movement in the issue of the powers of the Commission, apart from yet another government consultation process, the outcome of which is still unknown. The recent St Andrew's Agreement contains a commitment to bring forward legislation in the next parliamentary session to accord additional powers to the Commission. These include the power to compel evidence, access places of detention and rely on the Human Rights Act when bringing judicial proceedings in its own name. While this is welcome news, the fact that legislation will not be developed until 2007 – some six years after the Commission first submitted its recommendations on this issue to government – is hardly to be applauded. It also remains to be seen whether the government will actually be true to its word in this regard – past experience does not bode well.

When taking office, the new Commissioners promised to make the Bill of Rights a priority for their term of office. The St Andrew's Agreement also brought "good" news for the Bill of Rights in announcing that the long awaited Roundtable Forum of political and civil society representatives will be convened and hold its inaugural meeting in December of this year. Again, it seems strange to welcome something that was promised three years ago. Nonetheless, it is an extremely important initiative and one that must happen as soon as possible to move the Bill of Rights debate ahead. The role to be played by the Commission in this process must obviously be one of maintaining its independence, given that it is the body ultimately responsible for presenting advice to the Secretary of State on the Bill of Rights.

As regards the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Policing and Diversity – an aspiration or a legal obligation?

Addressing prejudice and embracing diversity is a challenge for everyone and every institution – but arguably more so for those involved in law and order, given the particular power relationships that operate in that environment. Leaving our own police service aside, one only has to look at the devastating conclusions reached by the McPherson Inquiry, and the impact of the Rodney King case and subsequent race riots in LA, to see the dangers that exist when prejudice in all its forms is not acknowledged or addressed.

But addressing prejudice and embracing diversity – while obviously interrelated – are two very different things. It could be argued that the latter cannot be achieved without the former. In reading the draft diversity strategy recently issued for consultation by the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI), it is therefore extremely disappointing to see how little (if any) of the strategy is dedicated to addressing the attitudes and prejudices that exist in the PSNI (as in any other institution made up of human beings) that will in themselves prevent the service from embracing diversity in the way this document desires.

CAJ believes that it is not enough to talk of ‘diversity’ in the sense of learning, for example, of the distinctive religious beliefs and cultural practices as between, say, Hindus and Muslims. Any effective diversity strategy must be directed at learning in this context about the theory and practice of sectarianism, racism and other forms of prejudice – both in society at large, and in the institutions of society which are meant to be addressing and tackling ever-increasing hate crimes.

Although not mentioned in this report, of relevance is CAJ’s deep concern at learning that Mediation NI has been forced to withdraw from the anti-sectarianism training it was providing to PSNI new recruits, since it was unhappy at the PSNI’s insistence that this be changed to “diversity” training. A failure to address head-on what sectarianism actually is and how it should be tackled can only have negative implications for the PSNI’s ability to address the problem. Given the political and religious divide here, and the PSNI’s own figures which show that sectarian hate crime accounts for over half of all recorded hate crimes, it is difficult to fathom how the PSNI could have concluded that anti-sectarianism training was no longer necessary.

Likewise, the approach taken recently in the “guide to appropriate language” for the service did little to reassure us that there are any attempts within the organisation to address prejudice and thus genuinely embrace diversity. This guide effectively contains long lists of highly inflammatory and objectionable terminology, and there is a danger that it might lend itself to exactly the wrong kind of usage and feed the very “canteen culture” that such a guide is presumably intended to undermine. In an era where incidents of racist hate crime are soaring, and research shows that the police and criminal justice agencies are failing to adequately address it, such an approach to issues of race and diversity is clearly problematic.

Diversity or Equality?

However, of greater concern to CAJ was the fact that scant reference is made throughout the document to the PSNI’s legal obligations under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity. While the document points out that equality and diversity are interdependent, no proper analysis is given of how the full implementation of section 75 would deliver equality and thus contribute to greater diversity.

In CAJ’s opinion, a more rigorous examination of how the PSNI must properly implement section 75 across all of its policy work (which we have found disturbingly lacking on numerous occasions) would in fact lead to a greater respect for diversity across the service. This is particularly necessary since delivering equality is in fact a legal obligation, while there is no corresponding diversity obligation. Thus, to have a diversity strategy in place alongside an equality scheme, and not to analyse or highlight the differences that exist between these strategies, or how they could complement each other, is a conspicuous gap.

This situation is further exacerbated by the confusing and inconsistent messages generated around the co-terminous use of equality and diversity terminology, thus sending confusing signals and risking lowering the threshold in relation to the equality despite its greater legal status.

In conclusion, while the concept of a Diversity Strategy for the Police Service of Northern Ireland is a very laudable one, we find this document to be a waste of resources, in that it actually contains numerous instances of direct replication of activities that are already required by law under the PSNI’s equality scheme, and does little if anything to address prejudice within the organisation.

Civil Liberties Diary

September 1 Inquiry into the sectarian killing of Robert Hamill is delayed as ex-RUC officers try to secure anonymity in the hearings. The inquiry was scheduled to open on Monday, September 4th under former High Court Judge Edwin Jowtt.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessments, the body which advises on what is taught in schools in the north, has revised its primary curriculum with a new emphasis on human rights.

September 4 Katrina Kordula, of the Polish Welfare Association, claims that landlords are overcharging foreign nationals who are living in overcrowded conditions.

British government chooses Trevor Phillips to be the head of the new Commission for Equalities and Human Rights.

September 6 Inmate Eamon McKinney was under suicide watch in Maghaberry Prison when he was found hanged in his cell, a Belfast inquest hears.

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People has applied for a judicial review on Government legislation designed to protect children from abuse and wants smacking made illegal.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commissioner Monica McWilliams celebrates one year in her post. In that time the body has been contacted by 920 people compared with 420 in the year before.

September 7 The family of late RUC officer John Torney constable convicted of triple murder, has held a meeting with the Police Ombudsman in a bid to clear his name. They claim that important evidence at the original trial was ignored by the prosecution.

September 8 New report into alleged police collaboration with loyalist killers in Belfast has been postponed until November. Police Ombudsman investigators have uncovered new documents as part of their probe into the murder of Raymond McCord.

September 13 Head of the Prison Service, Robin Masefield, warns that up to 90% of the Northern Ireland prison population has mental health or other personality disorders.

The Historical Enquiries Team has been unable to find RUC files relating to at least 1,000 murders.

September 16 CAJ releases a report, named Equality in Northern Ireland: the Rhetoric and the Reality, which shows religious and political inequality in Northern Ireland has worsened in the past 30 years, with Catholic areas continuing to bear the brunt of social, political and economic disadvantage. The statistics are backed by the Northern Ireland Community Voluntary Association.

September 21 The Human Rights Consortium launches campaign to press Government for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Figures released by the Northern Ireland Prison Service showed that 152 officers and senior staff have been brought before disciplinary panels in the past five years.

The Security Service, MI5, is to have full legal representation at the public inquiry into the murder of human rights lawyer Rosemary Nelson, whose death was surrounded by allegations of state collusion.

September 28 Judicial review opens into the appointment of Bertha McDougall as Victim's Commissioner. The applicant, Brenda Downes, whose

husband was killed by an RUC plastic ullet, claims that the appointment did not fulfill the criteria for cross-community support.

September 30 A North Belfast mother who challenged the failure of the then RUC and British Secretary of State to properly protect Holy Cross children five years ago has vowed to take her case to the European Court of Human Rights after the Court of Appeal dismissed her application.

CAJ requires volunteers for court and inquiry observing. If you are interested, please contact the office on:

Tel: (028) 90961122
Email: info@caj.org.uk

CAJ's legal adviser is leaving for greener pastures (May to be exact!)

We are currently recruiting for a replacement. Contact Liz@caj.org.uk for details.

Compiled by Mark Bassett from various newspapers.

Bulletin of the Committee on the Administration of Justice
Just News
Human Rights in Northern Ireland

Just News welcomes readers' news, views and comments.

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