

Improving Community Relations

by
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Acknowledgements to the First Edition

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The views contained in this Paper are those of the authors and should not be taken to represent those of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights.

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Preface to the third edition

Improving Community Relations was written in 1986 as a report for the Northern Ireland Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights. Influenced by its analysis and recommendations the Government in 1987 established the Central Community Relations Unit at Stormont. In 1990, with the assistance of CCRU, the Community Relations Council was formed in order to support and promote community relations work at all levels within the community.

Improving Community Relations is being reprinted here by the Community Relations Council, with the permission of HMSO, in order to make more widely available its account of the history of community relations initiatives from 1969 to the mid-1980s and to restate the analysis and recommendations on which recent community relations developments have largely been based.

Hugh Frazer was at the time of this report in 1986 the Director of the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust. In 1987 he left that post to become Director of Combat Poverty in Dublin. He was appointed as a member of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council on its establishment in 1990.

Mari Fitzduff was in 1986 a journalist and researcher, and also an analyst and trainer in conflict resolution work. In 1988 she published a handbook for group work on community relations and in 1989 *A Typology of Community Relations Work*. In 1990 she was appointed as the first Director of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council. She is now Director of INCORE at the University of Ulster.

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Introduction

1. Origins and terms of reference of the report

In 1985 the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights received a suggestion from various groups in Northern Ireland working in the area of community relations that they should study the possibility of setting up a new body which would concern itself with the promotion of better community relations within the Province. They subsequently initiated this study to investigate:

(a) the adequacy and effectiveness of present structures for promoting improvement in community relations in Northern Ireland.

(b) whether a central body should be created to co-ordinate and fund community relations in the province.

2. The consultation process

In order to ascertain needs and possibilities in the area of community relations, 62 consultations were held with individuals and groups either working in the area or with an experience in related areas. These included many of the former workers of the original Community Relations Commission, set up in 1969, the Commission for Racial Equality, representatives from various Community Relations Councils in the United Kingdom and members of both statutory and voluntary bodies in Northern Ireland either directly or indirectly concerned with promoting community relations and politicians.

A list of all those individuals and groups interviewed is contained in Appendix 1.

3. The survey

Following our discussions with the above persons, and in order to further clarify needs and priorities of groups working in the area, a questionnaire covering broadly speaking the same areas was sent to 75 groups working in the area of community relations, mainly in Northern Ireland, but including also some in the Republic of Ireland, and in Great Britain. The questionnaire which was intended to supplement issues arising from our initial discussions in the consultation process covered such aspects as the staffing and financing levels of these organisations, and questions to elicit perceived needs, priorities and limitations of agencies in the area of community relations.

The questionnaire also asked whether consideration should be given to the establishment of a new agency, or whether the expansion of existing agencies should be considered, to undertake work perceived as being a priority in this area. Five surveys were returned unopened, five letters of support for increased work to be done in the area of community relations were received from groups who for various reasons were unable to complete the questionnaire, and 37 reconciliation groups completed and returned the questionnaire. While we recognise that approximately

1/3 of these agencies did not reply, in fact most of the major agencies working in the field did so. A list of those who completed the questionnaires is enclosed in appendix II.

An adapted variation of the questionnaire was also sent to a variety of other groups, including community, youth, women's and farmers' groups in order to investigate their willingness to enhance their work by extending it to include work of a community relations nature, and to assess priorities and needs as they saw them in this field. Three letters of support were received from these agencies, and 23 completed and returned the questionnaire.

A list of those who completed and returned this survey is enclosed in Appendix II. A resume of the results of the survey along with the questionnaires are also included in Appendix II.

An initial draft of this document was then subsequently circulated to key people working in the area of community relations, and many of their comments were incorporated into the final text.

2 History of Community Relations Work

1. The Ministry for Community Relations & the Community Relations Commission

Following the re-emergence of sectarian violence in 1969 in Northern Ireland and particularly in the aftermath of the riots in Belfast and Derry in August 1969, the British Home Secretary, James Callaghan announced the establishment of a Ministry for Community Relations, and Community Relations Commission.¹ The Ministry was charged with promoting policies which would improve community relations, and the Commission with the promotion of activities relevant to this field. By December 1969, both bodies were in operation.

The Ministry of Community Relations was made responsible by passing of the Social Need (Grants) Act² for administering a major financial programme of social intervention. They were responsible for making money available under the Act to statutory bodies and voluntary organisations including community groups for what were considered to be worthwhile projects. They were also responsible for financing the activities of the Community Relations Commission.

The terms of reference of the Commission were almost identical to those of the Great Britain Race Relations Board³ and were:

- to stimulate and encourage the activities of bodies active in promoting harmonious community relations and to provide a measure of co-ordination;
- to provide educational and other programmes aimed at the promotion of better community relations;
- to advise any Minister of the Northern Ireland Government on any matter referred to the Commission considers should be brought to his attention;
- to commission or carry out any research into any matters concerned with community relations;
- to assist the Commissioner of Complaints in conciliation, if asked and to promote understanding of any acceptance of any of his recommendations.

The Commission comprised ten members, of whom two were ex officio, and the rest divided equally between Catholic and Protestant.

The Commission adopted as the main strategy of its work, the initiation of a community development programme across Northern Ireland. This aimed at building up strong confident community organisations, who it was hoped would subsequently begin to see areas of common interest on which they could unite across the sectarian barriers. Their involvement in this work inevitably led to substantial liaison between

the Community Relations Officers and other Government agencies, with field workers from the voluntary agencies, and with elected representatives of the communities.

The Commission also engaged in a programme of conferences to bring together people who might not normally meet from the various churches, educational establishments and communities. Many of these conferences were based on encouraging co-operation among communities on social issues of mutual concern, and did not necessarily have an overt community relations aim. They also brought together on several occasions members of various paramilitary groupings with community workers from throughout the Province for discussions of a political and social nature.

Their educational remit was fulfilled by setting up a sub-committee of the Schools Curriculum Committee under the Ministry of Education to see how schools could contribute to the improvement of Community Relations, and the Commission supported the subsequent programme financially and administratively for two years.

The Commission also engaged in a research programme to obtain basic information about social problems and their relationship to the inter-community problem and the results of these were subsequently published. While its brief included the responsibility to give advice to the Ministry of Community Relations, in fact this advice was only once sought by the Ministry.

Both the Commission and the Ministry had a short life. In April 1974, the Minister for Community Relations in the Assembly for Northern Ireland, Mr Ivan Cooper, announced that the Commission was to be wound up.⁴ One month later, on 28th May, the power-sharing Executive fell. The following year the Community Relations Commission was formally abolished.⁵ Several reasons appear to have contributed to the abolition of the Commission itself.⁶

Almost from the beginning, the Ministry appeared to view the Commission's community development programme with something akin to suspicion. The possibly radical nature of a successful community development programme, independent of Government control, was thought by many in the Commission to be inevitably threatening to Ministry and politicians alike. Also, as the Ministry held the purse strings of the Commission, this contributed to the tension. The Commission felt itself to be an independent body, and resented what they saw as the restrictive nature of the hierarchical structure and the bureaucratised nature of the Ministry. Some politicians also resented what they saw as an agency diminishing their capacity to represent their communities, and were on the whole relieved to have it abolished.

Assessments of the success or otherwise of the Community Relations Commission vary. Many respondents to the research felt that its role in instigating community development work in Northern Ireland had been extremely useful, and the commitment of the development officers to this work was frequently commented upon. On this issue of whether the consequent improvement of a decrease in sectarianism had been achieved, assessments varied. Some people felt that certainly

in the case of individual community leaders, successful understanding and respect for each others point of view had been achieved. Others felt that such understanding had not had a chance to work itself out at actual community level, because of the curtailment of the community development programme. A proposal for a substantial expansion in this programme had in fact been proposed by the Directory of the Community Relations Commission in 1971, but such a proposal had been dismissed by the Ministry. Both the Chairman of the Commission, Dr Maurice Hayes, and the Director of the Commission, Hywel Griffiths, subsequently resigned. The majority of the people who worked for the Commission, and who were consulted for the purposes of this report are still convinced of the merit of the community development process but would in many cases now see the additional necessity of developing methods to enhance the community relations aspect of any future community development programme.

2. Department of Education

Following the collapse of the Assembly, and the termination of the work of the Community Relations Commission, the order which officially abolished the Commission also settled responsibility for community relations within the Province on the Department of Education. They were charged with 'formulating and sponsoring policies for the improvement of community relations in Northern Ireland'. They were also given responsibility for administering grant aid to areas of social need.

3. District Councils

In 1976, District Councils were charged by Government with the responsibility for supporting and encouraging community groups, including groups of a community relations nature. This was to be done through the development of Community Services Departments, and the hiring of Community Services Officers. But while the Department of Education at present funds District Councils to the tune of £2,000,000 per annum for work of a community services nature the majority of the money is available to District Councils appears to be spent on resources and community centres. The Community Services Officers are subsequently heavily weighed down with administrative and managerial duties, often at the expense of any community development work.⁷ Of the 26 councils, only seven spend more than 10% of their grant on assisting voluntary groups. And even where some finance is available to voluntary groups, the sensitive nature of most community relations work makes support for it unacceptable to most local politicians. Hence there was considerable concern among most respondents to the research that District Councils were failing in their duty to provide funds for community relations work.

4. Community relations groups

The Department of Education, apart from grant aiding the District Councils, also gives grants totalling £410,000 (1986/87 budget) annually to assist community relations work in schools and through voluntary agencies. These include teacher

secondments for training teachers to work in community relations work, as well as a variety of educational and holiday programmes.

5. Voluntary organisations

Attempts to encourage respect for differing traditions existing within Northern Ireland by voluntary agencies were few previous to the Civil Rights movement in 1969. The Irish Association, founded in 1938, had concerned itself with artistic, cultural and archaeological interests as the means of promoting tolerance. The Fellowship of Reconciliation held several conferences in the late 1950s aimed at bringing Protestants and Catholics together. And Corrymeela was founded in the early 1960s, using mainly seminars and work camps in their attempts to break down barriers between the communities.

Since 1969, voluntary agencies concerned with working in this area have flourished and waned - the most notable among them being The Peace People, PACE, New Ulster Movement, Women Together, All Children Together, Two Traditions Group, and a variety of holiday projects e.g. Harmony Community Trust, Holiday Projects West. A major group which primarily concerns itself with promoting understanding between North and South is Co-operation North. The present count of organisations concerning themselves primarily with community relations work in Northern Ireland is estimated at being in the region of 45.

The number of full-time staff employed to work in this area is approximately 117 (including ACE workers) and the number of part-time voluntary staff is 86.

The annual expenditure of the groups working primarily in the area of community relations is approximately £633,000. Of this approximately £190,000 comes from the Department of Education. Co-operation North functions with a budget of approximately £900,000 (1985/86 budget).

The methods used to pursue their aims are, in order of popularity:

- Conferences/Meetings
- Cross-Cultural Activities
- Discussion Groups
- Community Development
- Publications
- Community Education

6. Adult education

In 1977, the CARE Project, based in Magee College, Londonderry, set up a project, in co-operation with BBC Radio Foyle, to record and disseminate the views and opinions of Protestants and Catholics on a variety of aspects of their lives, including community relations. The subsequent tapes were used to promote discussion groups across the Province.

In 1985, degrees in Peace Studies at undergraduate level were offered by the

University of Ulster, based in Magee College, in Londonderry. These courses at present have 15 students.

The Workers Education Association and the Ulster People's College have both set up programmes designed to help people explore areas relevant to community relations i.e. discussions on the nature of the conflict, existing fears and possible solutions to the political dilemma.

7. Research

In 1980 the Centre for the Study of Conflict was formally recognised by the Senate of the New University of Ulster (now the University of Ulster). It has concerned itself mainly with compiling and initiating research relevant to the Northern Ireland problem, particularly in the educational field. It is now in the process of extending its research concerns, and organising occasional seminars on areas related to conflict in Northern Ireland. Academics working at Queen's University have also contributed substantially to relevant research done in the Province, and have compiled useful registers of research completed.

8. Royal Ulster Constabulary

The Community Relations branch of the RUC was established in 1970 and undertakes projects designed to promote co-operation between the two communities. Their projects with youth include joint summer camps, rambles, discos, football leagues, and quiz competitions. They attempt to facilitate any discussions which will lessen inter-community problems, and hold seminars to provide a forum where representatives from many different interest groups can discuss issues of common concern.

The RUC also undertake some limited training of their officers, in conjunction with Stranmillis College, in preparing their officers to deal sensitively with issues of a contentious community nature.

9. Belfast Areas of Need (Community Relations)

In 1983 the Department of Education offered Belfast City Council an allocation of £100,000 per annum for three years to be spent on improving community relations - known as the BAN (Community Relations) programme. An assessment of the scheme shows that there were conflicting interpretations among the various sections who were offered the money (Community Services, Leisure Services and Parks) as to what was meant by improving community relations, and there was equal confusion as to what programmes would be effective. The chief result from this was a general increase in the support for the principle of improving community relations, although many felt, in common with other groups attempting to work in this area, that adequate theory or practice to effectively fulfil their objectives were at present lacking.

10. Churches

Over the years there have been a number of initiatives by members of churches to promote understanding and communication with other churches and there has been a structuring of communication channels between major churches in the 1970s. Organisations such as the Irish Council of Churches and the Churches Central Committee for Community Work, the Corrymeela Community and Columba House and the Inter Church group on Faith and Politics have been active in encouraging such initiatives. At a local level there have been a number of inter-church committees established such as the Waterside Churches Committee for Community Needs and the Glengormley and District Inter-Church Community Action Group. The Irish Council of Churches has initiated a Peace Education Centre which concerns itself with the provision of materials for Peace Education Programmes. However, the impression of most people we talked to is that the Churches have not done enough to actively encourage reconciliation and that initiatives in the field of community relations tend to depend on the work of a few committed individuals.

3 Defining the Problem

1. Introduction

A major and perennial difficulty for many groups working in the area of community relations has been their difficulty in adequately defining what they see as the objectives of community relations work in Northern Ireland. This confusion has frequently been reflected in their difficulty in formulating strategies to contribute effectively to this work.

2. Origin and development of the term 'Community Relations'

The term community relations seems to have been coined around the early sixties in Britain and pertained to solutions being sought there in relation to the problem of racial disharmony, apparently arising from the immigration of various African and Asian peoples to the United Kingdom. Earlier definitions of the objectives of community relations work seem to have primarily concerned themselves with emphasising the idea of a harmonious existence between differing groups, with the intended goal of integrating the minority groups into the wider community as quickly as possible. Later definitions of objectives have put a far greater emphasis on the idea of equality of basic rights and opportunity for all groups, whilst simultaneously encouraging cultural diversity, as being preferable contemporary objectives of community relations work. This shift in emphasis is reflected for example in the changing of the title of the Race Relations Board in Great Britain to the Commission for Racial Equality in 1976. Similar shifts in emphasis have taken place in New Zealand. Therefore what was called the Community Relations Commission has been called the Human Rights Commission since 1977.⁸ These shifts in emphasis reflect development in thinking about how the problem of disharmony between groups is to be understood, and also about how the problems produced by such disharmony are to be tackled.

3. The term 'Community'

Definitions as to what constitutes a community are fraught with difficulty. Communities are often defined as those groups within which frequent social interaction occurs, common ties abound, and who often live within a common geographical area. But definitions keep changing, reflecting the complexity of ideas surrounding the notion of what constitutes a community. While differences in groupings within Northern Ireland normally emphasise the two main groupings of Loyalists and Nationalists, most of us in fact function as part of many communities. While this study addresses itself primarily to problems existing in the main between these two major communities, we feel there may be a danger to the basic rights of all not to acknowledge the existence of other groups in Northern Ireland, many of whom also suffer from prejudice and discrimination eg. the Equal Opportunities Commission considers that in fact women are the community most at risk from

discrimination against their particular communities. So the problem of prejudice and discrimination extends well beyond political and religious allegiances.

4. The term 'Relations'

In trying to define what we mean by adequate "Relations" between communities, we arrive at a continuum of what may be seen as either desirable or possible. There are some in Northern Ireland who dream of a day when all peoples in the larger community of Northern Ireland will not only accord each other equality of right and existence, but will be "reconciled" with one another, sharing feeling of mutual understanding and respect, and will work to achieve these aims. Many others would settle for the less idealistic goal of equitable arrangements between communities, which would include political accommodation of a kind, with behaviour which is of an acceptable level i.e. neither discriminatory nor aggressive.

5. Prejudice, intolerance and discrimination

The existence of prejudice, discrimination and intolerance existing between the two main communities in Northern Ireland is well documented.⁹ Prejudice is the term used to denote a certain attitude, often not based on reality, towards another person or group. It is usually used to signify a negative attitude, although positive prejudice is also possible and prevalent, particularly in our attitudes to our own group.

Prejudice is often based on assumptions about the other "group" which are not necessarily our subjective experience, but untested or inherited assumptions. Much reconciliation work - particularly that which focuses on experiences of a primarily "contact" kind, is based on the idea that if one group actually gets to know the other, then the reality of the other grouping's favourable aspects will be revealed and mutual respect will develop. No doubt this learning sometimes happens. However, often allied to a prejudiced attitude is lack of tolerance.

Tolerance is the ability of individuals or groups, despite the vigour of their own convictions, to allow for differences of opinions or beliefs by others. Allied to the task of exposing faulty assumptions about the other side, there is perhaps the even more difficult task for educators of individuals and groups learning that others are different, often engage in practices or hold aspirations which may be abhorrent or distasteful to our particular belief system - but that nevertheless, unless their conviction conflicts with people's basic human rights, they are entitled to our tolerance. Our entitlement is to persuade others to believe as we do, through acceptable persuasive behaviour. Such persuasive behaviour is an accepted right in our society, and is a fact of most of our churches missionary work, our current advertising system, and our political systems.

Discrimination is the behaviour that results from prejudice and intolerance when we deny experiences or rights to people or groups because they are different. Such discrimination can be affected either individually or collectively, consciously or

sometimes unconsciously because the system or institutions of our society have become structured in a manner that discriminates.

6. The extent of prejudice

People and groups vary in their capacity not to pre-judge, to be tolerant of the differing behaviours and beliefs of other persons or groups, and in their perception and allocation of justice. They will vary in these capacities, not only according to the nature of the persons or groups, but also according to the pressures apparent in varying situations e.g. personal relationships between people of different communities in Northern Ireland are often admirable, and only deteriorate at times of stress.

There may be at one end of a continuum the individual or group who tries to keep their attitudes flexible and in touch with first-hand experience. They can recognise unfair treatment of others, and can respect, perhaps even enjoy the differing aspects of the other person or group. Such a person will by and large not have his/her attitudes determined mainly by group norms.

At the far end of this continuum we find those who will avoid facing up to facts about the other person or group which will change their hostile attitude to them. They feel threatened by differences of custom or belief. Such people or groups will often find or create reasons to justify discrimination, or deny that it exists and they will try to avoid situations which might challenge their beliefs. Their rigid attitudes serve a function for themselves or their groups, and can prove difficult to change.

Most of us move uneasily somewhere within the centre of the continuum - ie. our attitudes are often shifting and amorphous and for the most part are linked to our situation.

Attitudes will harden under pressure and at times of crisis, but can also shift with eg. education, rewarding experiences, and the easing of stress.

According to where one resides along this continuum of Tolerance/Intolerance one will be more or less available to different programmes designed to combat prejudice eg. the central group will be more open to receiving information of a positive nature about the other 'side' through contact and communication. For those who hold convictions so strongly that they leave no room for compromise with others whose convictions differ, such programmes may prove useless, and different programmes must be developed. Bearing these variations in mind, strategies for implementing change in attitudes may be more appropriately and effectively designed.

7. Prejudice: persons or systems?

People are both creators and the products of the systems within which they live. Discrimination and prejudice exist occasionally because of personality structures but

probably more often because of social and group structures e.g. political, educational, class, church and identity systems which continue and nurture prejudice, consciously or unconsciously. Hence work aimed at fostering tolerance must be aimed at many fronts simultaneously, stressing both change in persons and in the systems within which they function. Research has concentrated on producing analyses of prejudiced individuals, but is increasingly recognising the need to study situations and systems that foster prejudice and on the nature of group mechanisms that engender defensiveness and hostility.¹⁰

Structures which facilitate tolerance are more likely to be those which encourage self-confidence, allied with co-operative responsibility eg. Community Development programmes are likely to be processes which encourage the development of a community's confidence.

If such confidence can lead a community to join with other communities on issues of similar concern, then such a process is likely to engender respect for each other among the participants and to diminish prejudice.¹¹

8. Prejudice and its context

Prejudice and intolerance do not exist outside of time and place, but wane or flourish against the wider extraneous forces of history, environment, economics and politics. Such forces are always crucial in determining whether or not a just and tolerant society can develop.

9. Historical context

Many people in Northern Ireland would see changes in attitudes and discriminatory behaviour as being dependent upon a resolution of the historical constitutional crisis. When we have won -United Ireland, Integration with Britain, or an Independent Ulster, then we can talk to the other side. And they see such a resolution as being of primary importance. Hence they see talk of improving community relations as being of no relevance until the constitutional problem is settled. They make relationships dependent upon such a settlement. However the majority of people that we spoke to shared the view that a satisfactory constitutional settlement is dependent upon group relationships within the community. And that there may be grounds for saying that there will be no constitutional settlement that will lead to any lasting peace unless the way in which each group sees the other's aspirations has shifted to one of understanding and relative trust. Hence to leave the problem of improving community relations until one has finally solved the constitutional issue may merely exacerbate, not only the problem of relationships between the communities, but also the task of finding an acceptable constitutional settlement.

10. Environmental context

While it is not inevitable that people who live and work closely and interdependently together will respect and understand one another, it is often true that segregated communities facilitate fears and suspicions. In Northern Ireland almost all educational institutions up to third level are segregated. And often housing, work and leisure facilities are similarly separate. Without the active development of integrated environments it is difficult to see how tolerance can develop. In this respect it is encouraging to note the growth in integrated education within the Belfast area. However the growth of such facilities has been the product of a few committed individuals rather than the active support of the Government for such facilities. Unless extensive thought is given to increasing the environmental possibilities for contact and co-operation, it is difficult to see how opportunities for mutual understanding can develop.

11. Economic context

The level of a person, group or nation's economic status will often affect the level of tolerance shown by them. While economic prosperity, with wealth relatively equitably distributed will not totally eliminate prejudice, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that it is in times of economic scarcity, or in areas of particular economic scarcity, where there is strong competition for jobs, houses and other resources that it is likely to flourish. Hence, any programmes designed to combat intolerance will be much more likely to be effective in the context of a flourishing and just economy. Judged by almost any significant social indicator, Northern Ireland ranks bottom of the United Kingdom league with higher rates of unemployment and lower rates of pay for those in employment.

12. Political context

Whether or not a problem is tackled with the seriousness which is its due will depend very much upon the political climate and the priorities of the Government in power. It is difficult to effect substantive change in our society without the necessary political will which will facilitate legislation and make available the necessary economic resources to deal with the problem. Macro-political priorities change. Unfortunately, these are more often directed at responding to crises than at preventing them. This accounts for the far greater present allocation of resources e.g. in the Health Services to work of a remedial rather than a preventative nature, and in Northern Ireland to work of a security rather than a community relations nature.

Local political priorities must also be considered. Unfortunately, most of the local political groupings have concerned themselves rarely with the problem of improving community relations - and in fact many were seen by our respondents as hindering rather than helping such work. It seems inevitable in the present political climate that politicians concern themselves primarily with expressing the fears of their own constituencies, rather than facilitating listening between the communities. The view was frequently expressed that work of a community relations nature could only be

done by by-passing local politicians, because of the nature of the political game which was absorbing their energies, and was often dependent upon encouraging differences, rather than communication. Nevertheless, their power to effect change was recognised, and hopes expressed that ways could be found to harness it in a constructive fashion.

Any successful programmes to improve community relations would therefore seem to require, on the political level:

- That the British Government would seriously consider reassessing the problem in Northern Ireland so as to prioritise not just security but also resourcing other activities designed to improve relations between the two main communities. It is interesting to note in this context that while the Law Order Protective and Miscellaneous Services Northern Ireland allocation is £436.3 million - a figure which doesn't include a lot of security costs such as the army - the budget for all groups working in the community relations area comes to less than 1 million per annum.
- That local politicians could at least commit themselves to political accommodation, if not reconciliation, within the Province.

Without these commitments, work aimed at improving community relations is likely to prove a very difficult task.

4 Possibilities for Change

1. Introduction

As objectives, we have taken the term community relations work to include all activities designed to:

- improve communication and understanding between communities in Northern Ireland;
- promote a tolerant acceptance of the existence of a diversity of traditions and cultures within our society;
- encourage structures which safeguard the rights of all members of the Northern Ireland community.

While work of this nature in Northern Ireland will inevitably concentrate on the problematic relationship at present existing between the two main cultural traditions in Northern Ireland, we feel that the work involved of its nature will also include the promotion of general tolerance and understanding and appreciation of the diversity of other communities in Northern Ireland who have also documented prejudice against them.

Our relative ignorance about the causes of prejudice and intolerance is not surprising. The study of such topics by psychologists and social psychologists is fairly recent. It has sprung mainly from the experience of psychologists in trying to understand the Nazi phenomenon and the way in which discrimination was cultivated in millions of ordinary Germans towards the Jews, the difficulties encountered in securing civil rights for blacks in the United States, and the present uneasy balance in international relations. While theories in this area of a sociological and psychological nature have proliferated and studies and experiments about effecting positive attitude changes have flourished, much of the evidence is still piecemeal. Nevertheless, there is available to us some useful evidence on which there is relative consensus as to what can be facilitative in this field.

2. Legislation

Legislation if enforced can prove to be an effective means of affecting overt prejudice. It is an expression of official morality of a Government's intentions for the rights of its people. It can act as a restraint to bigotry, attempting to equalise advantages and lessen discrimination. It can also be educative in forming attitudes e.g. Many people who originally protested at having to wear seat belts eventually began to feel uneasy if not wearing them when driving.

Good legislation is an essential first step which sets the baseline for tolerable, acceptable behaviour towards all members of our society.

While recognising the efforts made by Government to secure adequate legislative reassurance for the rights of all within Northern Ireland through the Fair Employment Agency (FEA), and through the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR) itself, the need for further improvement in this area was many times mentioned by our many respondents. Two suggestions were made frequently enough to be noted here:

(a) That a Bill of Rights be introduced in Northern Ireland as soon as possible. It is interesting to note in the light of this that a survey by Moxon Browne in 1979 showed 75% of Protestants in favour of this idea and 92% of Catholics in favour of it. We understand the SACHR has also investigated the possibility of such a Bill.

(b) That instead of the present existing structures of the FEA and the Equal Opportunities Commission - and possibly SACHR - there should be one comprehensive body with a consistent anti-discrimination brief, thus establishing a means of establishing rights which may be more inherently applicable to all in the community. It is interesting to note in this context that the Commission for Racial Equality in Great Britain, following a recent case of discrimination which found in favour of a white person was faced with mounting an educational programme to establish that in fact anti-discrimination legislation is there to protect the rights of everyone. This logic has led to some nations terminating single concern agencies to subsume their duties within the overall framework of a general agency to protect the rights of all citizens e.g. The Canadian Human Rights Commission protects against discrimination on any of ten grounds: race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, marital status, family status, pardon conviction or disability.¹²

Similarly, the Australian Human Rights Commission exists to provide protection against discrimination on any grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.¹³

Such an agency must also be seen to be easily available in the first instance for consultation and when action is seen to be necessary the procedures for such action must not be unduly protracted or cumbersome. Many respondents felt that seeking redress against discrimination through the FEA was fraught with difficulties through a combination of cumbersome procedures which resulted in long delays and rendered the law less effective. While legislation to enforce non-discriminatory behaviour is the essential basis of any programme intending to combat intolerance, there are several reasons why it may not be enough just to depend on legislation.

Legislation does not necessarily instil subjunctive tolerance. Suppressing discriminatory behaviour, without attempting to tackle heartfelt feelings about the objectives of prejudice may render the law less effective, and probably more difficult to enforce. There is apparently effective legislation to deal with racial discrimination in the United States yet the Ku Klux Klan still exists. And in times of stress behaviour can easily slip, fuelled by residual intolerance ideas, into illegal behaviour.

It is also evident that laws against public expressions of prejudice e.g. the prevention of incitement to hatred legislation will not deter the convinced bigots, particularly when they feel they are acting in accordance with what they feel to be higher law eg. God, or a historical right. When this is seen to be the case contempt for the law, and consequent disregard for it, can easily be engendered.

Another factor in limiting the effectiveness of laws against discriminatory behaviour is that much discriminatory behaviour springs from unconscious assumptions affiliations or an unconsciousness of the discriminatory nature of the structures within which we function. In many cases, explanations, reasoning etc. allied with the possible eventual back-up of legislation, may prove to be more effective in effecting change.

For these reasons, while adequate legislation and enforcement of that legislation is the first step in protecting the rights of all, it is not sufficient in ensuring tolerance.

3. Government

The potentially largest change agent at the present time in Northern Ireland is probably the Government. They are the largest employer in the Province. Also the Departments of Education, Health and Social Services and the Environment in particular have structures which affect and influence the daily lives of all in Northern Ireland. The role that these Departments can play in alleviating discrimination and facilitating respect for all has been usefully shown in the way in which the Housing Section of the Department of the Environment tackled the problem of discriminatory allocation which had been one of the most provocative areas in fuelling the 1969 campaign for Civil Rights. Similarly, one of the main funders of reconciliation work in the Province has been the Department of Education.

Despite these initiatives it is surprising how little evidence there is that tackling the problem of community relations is a priority with the Government. There are many indications that other countries and even other parts of the United Kingdom have begun to tackle such problems as prejudice and discrimination and structures that continue these, in a more energetic way than is apparent in Northern Ireland.

Tackling racial difficulties in Great Britain at a preventative rather than a security level appear to obtain far more funding and attention than the community problem here in Northern Ireland. While there are obvious differences in the problems -particularly in the size of the minority as the division in racial terms is 95%/5% as opposed to our 60%/40% nevertheless many areas of common concern are shared by both problems ie. the problem of discrimination and of prejudice, an of institutionalised structures which frequently reflect these prejudices. Not only has the Government instituted the Commission for Racial Equality with a budget of £9.3 million and a staffing level of 189 (1984/5 figures) but within the Home Office there is the Community Projects section which has overall responsibility for the Government on any issue concerning race relations. In addition, each Government Department has within it a Unit concerned to overview all briefs and programmes which are likely to positively or detrimentally affect relations between the races. The

co-operation between such units and the Home Office is generally good.

In addition, some local authorities now retain Policy Units, retained by the Council as a whole, which contain officers responsible for advising statutory bodies about how proposed and present programmes may affect race relations within their area. The Commission for Racial Equality also gives funding to local Community Councils, which attempt to tackle racial tensions within the local areas.

At the moment within Northern Ireland while there is some evidence of efforts by Government to tackle the problem of community relations seriously i.e. its sponsorship through the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland of such schemes as Corrymeela, Harmony Community Trust, Peace People, East Belfast Community Council and its various school projects and the recent grant to the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust by the Department of Education to fund Inter-Community Contact Schemes, such support is piecemeal and appears to lack overall policy.

We recognise there are many difficulties inherent in any comprehensive Government approach to the problem. Each Government Department has its own priorities and at the moment community relations is the concern of none in particular. Even if such a Department were to exist, there is a danger that it would in fact lessen the attentiveness of the other departments to relevant issues, on the basis that these issues were being taken care of elsewhere.

In fact the issue of community relations supersedes and embraces all Departments. An interesting analogy might be made with the issue of health. It is now realised that to leave issues concerning health to the Department of Health alone is ineffective. Health is affected intrinsically by unemployment, environmental conditions, educational priorities; similarly with relationships between the communities.

Governments are judged by the energy with which they will pursue their priorities. Where there is obvious community tension it appears ill-advised to ignore such tensions, in the hope that time, or a new constitutional settlement will alleviate them. They may, but undoubtedly they will be helped by a thorough and concerted application of policies and the resources to tackle the issues.

4. Structures

From the time we are born, we function always as part of a group. Family, school, church, work - all of these structures can facilitate people who are capable of tolerating the validly held views of other individuals or groups, or alternatively, can act as effective vehicles for acquiring prejudice. Evidence has linked authoritarian attitudes, often allied with negative attitudes towards any group that is different from our own - with e.g. child rearing practices where questioning of parental authority is disallowed. Other structures such as schools, or churches or work institutions which disallow questioning and deny to children or adults, any part in the decision-making process of the group, may also be facilitating intolerant attitudes. On the other hand, groups which allow individuals to empathise, take into consideration other people's points of view, and provide individuals with opportunities to take responsibility for

decisions affecting the group are likely to encourage tolerance.

There is also significant evidence to show that individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to be intolerant of others. One of the easiest ways to increase our feelings of self-esteem, is to at least feel better than someone else. This can happen also on a group level. Efforts directed therefore, at making individuals and groups more self-confident appear likely to yield dividends in terms of tolerance.

There is also adequate evidence to convince us of the fact that the less we know about the other group/person the more open we may be to negative prejudice. Segregation is no facilitator of understanding between people. If we have friends who are gay, or black, Protestant or Catholic, the less likely we are to be prejudiced against such people. Yet contact, to be a useful tool in promoting tolerance must be more than the casual meetings such as occur in much of our everyday lives with those with whom we have dealings with, or work with. Contact can take place among people without much real communication. Many people can work together in Northern Ireland for years, and never discuss what divides their communities. Politeness, while valuable for the everyday smoothness with which we run our lives, can often prove to be an insufficient basis on which to guard against hostile behaviour in a time of crisis. Casual contact therefore is unlikely to facilitate tolerance. However contact which involves meetings not just at individual but at group level, with possibly shared objectives by the group, and which can happen over a relatively long period of time is likely to encourage tolerance.

Structures which include any, or possibly all of the above components are likely to be useful in contributing to the task of increasing understanding between communities in Northern Ireland.

5. Community development

In adulthood, many of the activities likely to include the above elements - the acquisition of empathy through responsibility, the acquisition of self-confidence through assertion, and the facilitation of understanding through contact are likely to be programmes which fall under the broad heading of community development.

This was the strategy pursued by the original Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission. In doing this it was following what is generally referred to as the two-stage theory of community relations i.e.

(1) Community development projects can help build up communities' self-esteem and so counter feelings of despondency, apathy, alienation and despair. If groups can begin to take control of decisions affecting their own lives, e.g. re-housing, re-development, or acquisition of facilities their capacity to undertake co-operative decision-making with confidence will be increased.

(2) Such confidence will leave them less fearful and threatened by the 'other' side. It will free them to meet representatives from other communities in a spirit of mutual co-operation, enabling them to concentrate on pursuing issues of mutual interest to

them and in the process learning to trust one another.

Most respondents we spoke to in the course of this research were still convinced of the validity of this approach to community relations, but were concerned that it would be unsuccessful unless:

(a) The extent of community development work done could be increased. Many people pointed out that since the old Commission had ceased to exist there had been no agency has devoted to the development of networks, ideas and possibilities within community development as the Commission had been.

In recent years many voluntary agencies e.g. Belfast Voluntary Welfare Society, Forum for Community Work Education, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Extern, Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, have increased their commitment to a community development approach. Similarly, there had been in recent years a growing, albeit scattered and uncoordinated recognition in many statutory agencies e.g. the Department of Health and Social Services Board, Enterprise Ulster, the Probation Service, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and some District Councils of the value of such programmes. Recently many statutory agencies have been keen to support the promotion of the ACE Scheme. However statutory support generally appears to be piecemeal and lacking in any form of co-ordination and community workers in statutory agencies often seem to be operating on the periphery of their agency.

(b) Concern was expressed by many that if the community development process goes only so far as to increase confidence within the community, what can result in 'ghettoization' where a community may be confident enough to assert what it wants, but not confident enough to consider the opinion and rights of other communities. Community Development work therefore, if it were to make any serious inroads on improving community relations would need to be enhanced by ideas and networks which facilitated joint assessment by the communities of problems of mutual concern, allied with mutual action.

Such enhancement would involve particular skills and commitment, which demand time and space for reflection which many people working in community development programmes felt they at present did not have. Many respondents also expressed concern over the increasingly sectarian nature of the various community centres, and attributed this to the lack of the communities, and to ways of facilitating joint action by all communities on issues of mutual concern, which in turn might provide opportunities for groups to address themselves to the nature of sectarianism itself.

6. Community education

Ignorance and fear of the other are a key factor in the development of prejudice and intolerance. Time and again respondents have pointed out to us that the two

communities lack opportunities to learn about each other. One way of tackling this is through community education. A few important initiatives are being developed in this field which enable people from different communities to learn more about the common problems they face, e.g. the growth of neighbourhood women's groups has led to a share of experiences between women from Catholic and Protestant areas. Organisations like the Women's Information Day, the Women's Education Project, the Women's Centre and the Workers' Education Association have played a vital role in this process. The Ulster People's College is doing pioneering work in helping the two communities to communicate with each other, to appreciate and understand their respective traditions, to clarify the values and attitudes (social, political and religious) inherent in those traditions, to search for their common culture and history. Such initiatives are at present very small-scale and under-resourced but hold out important hope for improving understanding between communities.

7. Schools

Schools would at first sight appear to present to any person interested in effecting attitude change in appropriate and useful environment. They could possibly be seen as providing space for contact and structures which could allow for responsibility and understanding to develop through discussions. And yet most schools in Northern Ireland are actually structured to provide the opposite - they stand separately as symbolising people's need to protect their particular brand of beliefs and history as distinct from others. Within the schools, discussions are often fraught with the difficulties of teachers, already pressed by competing claims within their curriculum, the particular ethos of the schools and their need to defend it, and the structures of the schools which are often of an authoritarian nature.

Nevertheless, some interesting projects are being tried in particular through such projects as Education for Mutual Understanding and Community Relations in Schools which do provide opportunities for young people to come together in ways that are not normally possible. Initial assessments of these schemes¹⁴ certainly argue for their continuation and expansion, despite diminishing resources available to the educational sector.

The development of possibilities for integrated education is also encouraging movement. It is worth noting however that such possibilities have essentially materialised through the efforts of a few committed individuals rather than through any clear supportive and practical policy on the part of the Government. The lack of such a policy has discouraged many other groups from seeking integrated education particularly outside the Belfast area. Opinion polls have regularly shown a widespread public demand for integrated education and the target set by the Belfast Trust for Integrated Education of one-third of children in Belfast being educated in integrated schools by the year 2000 seems feasible if sufficient resources and encouragement are forthcoming.

8. Contact schemes

Many schemes for promoting community relations in Northern Ireland base their

projects primarily on the theory that contact with people and groups from a differing community will lead to tolerance and understanding. Co-operation North and the various holiday schemes for children are primary examples of this type of project. While it is true that people who are often segregated from an early age with few available opportunities to build up relationships of loyalty and trust with members from different communities, may benefit from programmes primarily focusing on contact measures, casual contact such as may happen on day outings, or get-togethers arranged specifically to facilitate contact are often unproductive of real change. Even residential holidays aimed at facilitating real understanding among young people will find that the structures to which the children will return in their communities, in the absence of shared schools, youth and leisure facilities will mitigate against any real long term shifting in attitudes. Northern Ireland has become increasingly ghettoised in the last 18 years, with only a few structures e.g. the integrated schools in Belfast to redress the balance. Projects using contact tactics as their method of working must recognise the fact that while contact with members of other groups rarely proves deleterious to relationships, it is unlikely to prove sufficient to change hostile attitudes unless accompanied by both active discussion programmes and possibilities for long term involvement and contact.¹⁵ However, in view of the lack of contact between many Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, contact schemes are clearly an important first step in the process of community relations and need to be expanded and their content developed. Certainly the efforts of organisations like Holiday Projects West, the Harmony Community Trust, Northern Ireland Children's Holiday Schemes and Children's Community Holidays to develop on-going follow-up activities has been very positive. Another important spin-off from organisations such as these, International Voluntary Service and other similar voluntary organisations is the opportunities they have given to young, often unemployed, volunteers to gain in self-confidence and meet people from another tradition over an extended period of time. Many of these young people become important catalysts for change within their own community.

9. Training

Cultural and social differences introduce complexities into communication and conflict in all societies. Northern Ireland, because of the volatile nature of the response to such conflicts has a particular need to take such complexities seriously.

Strategies which directly attempt to effect co-operation and tolerance are currently being developed and assessed. Such strategies have included in-depth group discussion, mediation and conflict resolution training, attitude and self awareness training, the experiencing of group functioning and its consequences, role playing and structured games. Some groups in Northern Ireland have been involved in developing such mechanisms on a fairly limited basis. Such groups have included the Dutch-Irish Northern Irish Advisory Committee, the Fellowship for Reconciliation, Corrymeela, and more recently Extern. The evidence for the effectiveness of such training is as yet unclear, and the fear was expressed by some respondents that such training could in the wrong hands be damaging and manipulative. On the other hand, not attempting to develop programmes which would attempt directly to affect attitude change can also mean that many well intentioned projects may be less

effective by default and while perhaps not increasing problems of prejudice, will do little to actually change them.

Respondents frequently pointed out the need for training to help people learn to:

(a) handle group discussions of a contentious nature, either within or between groups. Many people expressed their fears of embarking upon discussions of a sensitive nature, because of their insecurity about handling any hostile reactions should they arise, and their fear of their own ingrained reactions interfering with their capacity as a facilitator;

(b) initiate group discussion about issues that need to be assessed and aired as appropriately as possible. Many respondents avoided initiating such discussions, hoping that they would occur, as amicably as possible, of their own accord. Yet many agreed that people in Northern Ireland for the most part, took great care to prevent such discussions, lest offence be given or taken;

(c) learn methods, other than straight group discussions, which would facilitate empathy and understanding e.g. role play, and structured games;

(d) help communities to assert themselves more articulately, and enable them to balance their own particular rights against the rights of others, and the general needs of society;

(e) develop our listening skills. It was frequently remarked to us that people rarely listen to what the other side is saying, except from a spirit of defensiveness;

(f) cope with conflicts, which are an everyday, and often creative part of life, in ways that are less destructive than those frequently assayed in our societies today;

(g) train people who will be able to stand outside of particular conflicts and act as mediators in situations where listening, understanding and trust have broken down. Such programmes may not be without their difficulties, not the least being that the evidence in support of their effectiveness is piecemeal. Ways of usefully using them to facilitate political tolerance have also yet to be developed. Nevertheless, it is an area being explored with increasing seriousness by such groups as the Community Relations Councils in the United Kingdom, the Women's Movement, the Neve Shalom programmes concerned with increasing Arab-Israeli co-operation and United States community co-operation. As such they may usefully warrant further research as a possible instrument for attitude and behavioural change.

10. Research and evaluation

Many of the groups we surveyed felt that research designed to aid work in this field was extremely important. This reflected the difficulty many expressed at establishing what programmes would prove effective in their own work.

Two areas of concern were noted:

(1) The need to initiate research which would have some possible practical application to the Northern Ireland conflict situation. Suggestions for such research included the need to investigate the function of cultural identity in group and inter-group relations: to ascertain what might be appropriate training skills for interested change agents; how to increase listening and empathetic skills; how to facilitate moral development in the field of justice; assertion and negotiating skills for groups; analyses designed to locate and deal with institutional prejudices; practical ways of facilitating tolerance.

(2) As well as initiating new research on the above topics, it was also requested by many groups that research already carried out on the problem in Northern Ireland should be made available in an easily digestible form to groups working in the area, as well as research undertaken on situations in other countries which might prove to be of relevance.

Methods of evaluating the worth of work being done, or proposed, were also felt to be a related priority. It was accepted that work in this field, by its very nature, is often difficult to assess, both because of the difficulty in defining objectives for it, and because of the fact that much of the work done is done in the hope that it will be long term and cumulative. Nevertheless, despite such difficulty, in order to avoid apathy and despair and a waste of resources, it seems essential that some methods for such assessment be developed.

11. Co-ordination and support

An overwhelming need expressed by all respondents to the survey who were working in the area of community relations was the need of some means to:

(a) keep in touch with other groups working in a similar area, to take advantage of creativity in action in Northern Ireland and to avoid 'reinventing the wheel' as far as tactics and projects concerned with improving community relations were concerned;

(b) check out how or where their particular efforts fitted within any overall framework for action within Northern Ireland;

(c) facilitate bridging between groups who under normal circumstances of divided loyalties would find it difficult to come together. The work done by the CRC in bringing together paramilitary groups of all shades for discussions was frequently mentioned as work which it was no longer possible to do because of the lack of a credible agency. Our experience in talking with all of the political parties, including Sinn Fein, and also to the Ulster Defence Association has convinced us that they too would appreciate an agency able to facilitate communication between all types of groupings within Northern Ireland when appropriate and possible;

(d) act as a liaison body between groups working in the community relations field

and the Government. Many groups felt that representations to statutory bodies could be more profitably made if they were seen as coming from a major representative body, rather than from a single smaller group;

(e) assess needs and priorities about where action can and should be taken, eg. concern was expressed about the lack of community relations work happening in rural areas - where it was believed people were particularly inclined to sectarianism;

(f) find space and support for workers in this field to create and formulate new ideas to enhance their work;

(g) help them set realistic goals, in keeping with their resources and objectives;

(h) initiate pilot projects with suitable research and evaluation, in order to test hypotheses as to what might prove valuable work in this area;

(i) act as an agency that could begin to 'translate' the research being done by other agencies, or itself, into practical suggestions for activities;

(j) act as a support group for existing agencies, but also for any groups interested in starting to work solely in the area or wishing to enhance their existing work with a community relations dimension, in providing suggestions for contact, ideas for action or funding;

12. Funding

The most frequent plea heard from all groups working in the community relations field was for more funding to be made available to them to extend and continue their work. Many groups had had difficulty in finding funding, and pointed out the problems that the nature of their work engendered in this area, e.g. local councils were on the whole unwilling to fund work of this nature and politicians did not often see it in their interest to support work they sometimes considered to be of a dubious nature, and perhaps not in their own best interests. Complaints were also made to us that local funding structures sometimes precluded province-wide work.

Most groups felt that the low level of commitment of the Government to work in this area was reflected in the inadequate resources they made available for community relations work.

Groups not at present involved in community relations work, but who expressed themselves willing to enhance their work to undertake it, claimed that the major limitation on this willingness was the lack of available funds.

The recent announcement of increased funding from Government to the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust to enable it to increase its programme of support to new projects which will promote understanding and communication within and between communities is an encouraging, if modest development in this area.

5 Recommendations

1. Introduction

The evidence that has emerged in our study, both from the discussions we have had with various concerned individuals and organisations (Appendix I) and from the results of our surveys with concerned groups (Appendix II) is that most people believe that there is a need for a new Community Relations Agency. There is also however, a strong belief that the establishment of any new agency will need to be part of a package of initiatives if it is to make a significant contribution to the Northern Ireland problem. The extent of the divisions in our society are such that they affect all aspects of life from personal relationships to the educational, religious, economic, cultural and political aspects. Thus these divisions must be tackled in many different ways and at various different levels.

While our remit in this study was to consider the need for a new agency to improve community relations, in the light of the above considerations, our recommendation cover a wider range than just this one option.

Our recommendations are therefore in two parts:

- (i) Recommendations concerning the establishment and role of a new Community Relations Agency.
- (ii) Related recommendations, without which the possible contribution of any new agency would be significantly diminished.

2. A new community relations agency

A new agency should be established to support and encourage the efforts of all those individuals and groups concerned to improve communication, understanding and tolerance between communities in Northern Ireland and to initiate new work in this area.

The role of such an agency would include the following:

- (i) Act as a focal point for all those organisations active in this field encouraging links between them through regular meetings, conferences, seminar and publications.
- (ii) Stimulate community relations activity by providing specialist advice, guidance and help to all individuals, voluntary organisations, youth groups, church groups, schools and adult education groups, interested in improving relations between communities, disseminating ideas and examples of good practice and creating networks between people with similar concerns.

(iii) Encourage research into different aspects of the cultural and religious differences that exist between both communities; into ways of increasing inter-cultural awareness and inter-group contacts and into ways of promoting tolerance and understanding and eliminating prejudice and exclusion from opportunities on account of religion; monitor the effectiveness of various community relations initiatives and disseminate the results of research and monitoring so as to inform and influence practical work on the ground.

(iv) Initiate training for people involved in community relations work, ie. training for people involved in discussion groups of a contentious nature, training in mediation and negotiation and in conflict resolution skills.

(v) Encourage Cultural Awareness and Mutual Understanding Projects which will help groups to explore their own culture and heritage with the aim of developing a new awareness and appreciation of their own and other traditions and a recognition of the developing nature of identity and culture. Support should also be given to those who are developing new cultural perspectives that encompass both traditions.

(vi) Facilitate bridging and negotiation between groups who under normal circumstances would find it difficult to come together. This should include all groups involved in the conflict, including all political groups, and where appropriate, paramilitary groups. In particular efforts should be made to understand the perspectives of those who are most defensive and distrustful and discover ways in which new partnerships can be developed with them and in which they can be helped to understand and come to terms with the differences between the communities.

(vii) Work towards producing an agreed document explaining the term ‘community relations’ and placing it in the overall context of human rights. Such a document could be used as an educational tool for society as a whole and outline basic principles that the majority of people could be encouraged to subscribe to.

(viii) Increase public awareness and acceptance of the need to promote better community relations at all levels within the Northern Ireland community.

(ix) Liaise closely with community development groups (see Recommendation 5.10) with a view to encouraging and facilitating links between community projects of a similar nature from different areas.

(x) Give advice to Government via the proposed Government Unit (see Recommendations 5.8) on any matter which may have a serious bearing on community relations and make representations to the appropriate bodies on improving legislation and its enforcement to promote human rights and equality.

3. Structure

The new Community Relations Agency should be a voluntary organisation managed by a small independent board of eight trustees with a quarter of its membership appointed by Government and three-quarters nominated by key agencies actively

involved in building better community relations. The Agency would have the power to co-opt individual members with expertise that was relevant to the achievement of the Agency's objectives. We heard many arguments as to whether a Community Relations Agency should be part of or independent of Government. There is a clear need if initiatives on the ground are to flourish for a positive climate at Government level. However we believe that this is better taken care of by the creation of a Government Unit in the Secretary of State's Office as outlined in 5.8. Given this we believe that the argument that an independent agency will have more credibility on the ground is overwhelming. The appointment of a quarter of the committee by Government will serve to give the Government involvement without control, enhance the organisation's standing and so increase the likelihood of any recommendations it makes being carefully listened to. This is likely to be further enhanced if there is a good working relationship with the Unit in the Secretary of State's Office.

In addition to the small Board of Management a broader Advisory Council should be established which would bring together representatives of all the different community, religious, political and cultural organisations.

4. Staffing

It is envisaged that the staffing for such an agency would initially at least be fairly compact in size, composed of people committed to the work, and with appropriate expertise and enthusiasm to involve themselves in developing strategies to achieve the objectives outlined in 5.2 above. Thus key staff would include a Director, an Information Research Officer, a Training Officer and a small team of 5 or 6 specialist staff whose task would be to give help and encouragement to local community groups, voluntary organisations, youth groups, church groups, schools, adult education groups, etc., with a view to increasing the volume of community relations activity. They would also be available to help those caught up in situations of particular conflict. The team should encompass a variety of skills in community and political education, mediation, negotiation, conflict resolution and assertiveness training.

5. Funding of agency

Ideally the Agency would establish its independence through totally independent sources of funding. However we consider it unrealistic for such an agency to be able to raise the level of funds it is likely to require from private sources. We also believe that this would cut across the fund-raising efforts of existing voluntary bodies. We believe that if the Agency is to be of a sufficient size and stature to undertake the role outlined in 5.2 above, Government core funding will be essential. Indeed Government core funding will further emphasise its commitment to improving community relations. The proposed structure of the Agency should ensure that it retains its independent status. Another possible measure to assure the independence of the Agency could include ensuring that funds for the post of a chairperson - a post requiring a major commitment from a person of standing in the community - should

be raised from private sources.

6. Community relations agency as a funding source

We considered whether the proposed Community Relations Agency should have a separate fund to assist community relations projects, but on balance feel that it would be better concentrating on the other aspects of support needed by community relations projects. We feel it would be better if funding for community relations work came through the appropriate statutory agency depending on the particular activity. The Unit in the Secretary of State's Office (Section 5.8) should facilitate this development and take advice from the proposed Community Relations Agency on the development of effective funding policies by the various statutory bodies.

While the bulk of funding for community relations activities should come through Government agencies, there will be a need for some more flexible sources of funds to help new projects to start up and new ideas to be tried out. We recommend that this can best be done by the further expansion of existing charitable trusts such as the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust and the Ireland Fund, which are already active in this field. The Agency could also offer money for their work.

7. Timing

While there is never likely to be an ideal moment for launching a major initiative in community relations the timing of any new initiative must be handled with great sensitivity. It is important that if a new Agency is established that it achieves widespread support from across the community and thus care should be taken to avoid it becoming identified with any particular political initiative. It is also important that it is seen as one part of a process and not the solution to all the problems between communities in Northern Ireland. Its existence should be reviewed after five years.

8. Government unit

The promotion of better community relations must be made a key priority of the Government. While the establishment of a Community Relations Agency, core funded by Government, should in theory ensure that Government Departments in Northern Ireland should consult and liaise with such an agency in all areas concerning community relations, our discussions with Government agencies both in London and in Dublin have convinced us that an agency working within Government is much more likely to affect Government policies than an independent, albeit specialist agency working outside the sphere of Government.

Because of this we recommend that there should be established a specialist community relations unit within the Secretary of State's Office. Its function would be:

- (a) to advise the Secretary of State and other Ministers on all aspects of promoting better community relations and working to eliminate discrimination;

- (b) to ensure that all Government policies and the policies of all Government Departments in whatever field they operate - housing, health, industry, economic development, education - are geared to improving community relations, and to this end each Government Department should be required to clear all its policies with the special unit in the Secretary of State's Office;
- (c) to ensure that promoting community relations is given a much higher priority, and that adequate funding is made available to initiatives on the ground;
- (d) to provide a focal point at the heart of Government to which all those agencies on the ground concerned to build better relations between the communities and overcome all types of discrimination could relate, and into which they could feed ideas;
- (e) to liaise with any Community Development Agency (see Recommendation 5.10) and ensure that community development programmes, because of their potential value in contributing to community relations, should receive adequate funding and support through statutory sources.

We did consider the re-establishment of a separate Department of Community Relations, but there is a general view that such a Department would tend to provide an excuse for other Departments to opt out of responsibilities for promoting community relations and would lack sufficient influence at the heart of Government. We are aware of possible tensions between a Government Unit and a Community Relations Agency. However if the Agency were independent and the advantages of such independence were recognised by Government we feel that such tensions could be avoided.

9. Legislation

A widely perceived priority by respondents to this study was that detailed consideration should be given to introducing new legislation to strengthen anti-discrimination, prevention of incitement to hatred and related areas of law. In particular the power of the Fair Employment Agency to enforce such legislation should be strengthened. An allied concern with many people was that the possibility of amalgamating all the agencies concerned with discrimination whether of a racial, religious or sexual nature should be considered. Such an amalgamation could help to ensure that community relations activity is viewed in the wider context of human and civil rights. A major innovation of this nature would obviously need safeguards to ensure that any such change effected was not used as a vehicle to reduce funds available for work of this nature, and the work of any agency at present working in this area should not be downgraded. The need for a Bill of Rights to be introduced which would spell out the rights of all citizens was also frequently mentioned as a proposal for consideration. While it was not within our brief to study these areas any further, they were widely perceived priorities in underpinning any new Community Relations Agency.

We presume that the current investigation by the Standing Advisory Commission on

Human Rights will involve detailed consideration on these matters, and specific proposals to improve this essential area.

10. Community development agency

While there are a range of good reasons for encouraging community development activity at a local level quite apart from improving community relations we are convinced that community development can also be an important factor in facilitating better community relationships. We would strongly urge the Government to look at ways of encouraging a major growth in constructive community activity at a local level.

While it was not a central part of our brief to consider how an expansion in community development might be achieved very many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the current structures. In particular it was felt by many that local councils, to whom were devolved the responsibility for community development within Northern Ireland, have tended to be more concerned with the provision of community centres and services rather than community development programmes which will involve local people and enhance their personal growth and development. We recommend that further consideration be given to new arrangements to encourage the expansion of community development including the possibility of establishing an independent community development agency.

Hugh Frazer
Mari Fitzduff

August 1986

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Appendix I

Individuals and agencies consulted:

Sam Bailey, University of Ulster
 Pauline Berwick, Margaret Burns, Council for Social Welfare, Republic of Ireland
 Chief Supt. Bleakeney, Royal Ulster Constabulary Community Relations Branch
 Louis Boyle, Southern Health and Social Services Board
 Colm Bradley, Falls Community Council
 Paul Casey, Extern
 Sebastian Charles, Dean of Westminster
 Mary Clarke-Glass, Evelyn Collins, Equal Opportunities Commission
 Jerome Connolly, Maura Ward, Irish Commission for Justice and Peace
 Bob Cooper, Fair Employment Agency
 Austin Currie, Social Democratic and Labour Party
 John Darby, Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster
 Donald Davidson, Tom Johnson, Department of Education, Northern Ireland
 Eamonn Deane, Youthways, Londonderry
 Paddy Doherty, Colm Cavanagh, Derry Youth and Community Workshop
 Canon E Elliott, Prof R Buchanan, Joyce Neill, Brian McGuigan, Two Traditions Group
 Will Glendinning, Alliance Party
 Hwyl Griffiths, Wales Council for Voluntary Action
 Nigel Hamilton, Democratic Unionist Party
 Jeremy Harbinson, Policy Planning and Research Unit, Department of Finance and Personnel
 Tom Hartley, Sinn Fein
 Maurice Hayes, Department of Health and Social Services
 Brendan Henry, Belfast City Council
 Jackie Hewitt, Farset City Farm
 Keith Jenkins, British Council of Churches
 Winnie Jordan, East Belfast Community Council
 Kate Kelly, Department of Health and Social Services
 John Morrow, Corrymeela
 David Morton, Policy Unit, Bradford City Council
 Joe Mulvenna, BELTIE
 Clem McCartney, Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster
 Robert McCartney, Official Unionist Party
 Peter McLachlan, Belfast Voluntary Welfare Society
 Bill McStay, Marie Abott, Avila Kilmurray, Lorna Douglas, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
 Peter Newsom, Commission for Racial Equality
 Tom O'Connor, Churches Central Committee for Community Work
 Jackie Redpath, Shankill Bulletin
 J A Robins, Department of Health, Dublin
 Bill Rolston, University of Ulster
 Anne Sloane, Forum for Community Work Education

David Stevens, Irish Council of Churches
Paul Sweeney, Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust
Andy Tyrie, Hester Dunn Ulster Defence Association
Steve Webster, Maureen Baker, Community Relations Council, Leeds
Ron Wiener, Group Consultant, Leeds
Derick Wilson, Ex-Director, Corrymeela
Robin Wilson, Ulster People's College
Ian Woods, Co-operation North
Mr Wright's Office, Home Office, London

Communication through telephone and correspondence:
Mr Ryan, Association of Local Authorities

Appendix II

Results of the survey

Results of Survey carried out to:

- (a) examine needs and priorities of groups working in the area of community relations;
- (b) investigate aspirations of variety of voluntary and other groups to enhance their existing work by extending it to include work of a community relations nature.

Process

Reconciliation organisations:

75 organisations were surveyed, as listed in the directory of Peace and Reconciliation projects in Ireland, by Ellis. 45 of these work primarily within Northern Ireland. The rest function mainly in the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. Five questionnaires were returned due to defunct status of the organisation, or to changed address. Of the remaining 70 organisations, 37 returned the completed questionnaires, and five others sent letters of support for the idea of increased work in community relations. Most of the main agencies working in the area completed the questionnaires.

Survey of other organisations:

A sample of 75 organisations working in a variety of areas - e.g. youth, women, community, education - were also surveyed, using an adapted variation of the questionnaire sent to the reconciliation organisations. Of these organisations 23 replied.

A list of all organisations who replied to the survey is attached at the end of this Annex.

Results

Staff at present engaged in community relations work:

Full-Time 117; Part-time 84; Voluntary 86 (full-time).
These figures include ACE workers.

Finance

Annual expenditure of groups who replied to the survey, working mainly in the area of community relations is £633,000. The Department of Education aid such groups with approximately £190,000 per annum and further grant aid school based projects

with approximately £220,000.

Co-operation North, which receives its finances mainly from businesses both North and South of the border had a budget of £900,000 in 1985/86.

Methods used by community relations groups to further their aims, in order of popularity:

- 1 Conferences/Meetings.
- 2 Cross-Cultural Activities.
- 3 Discussion Groups.
- 4 Community Development.
- 5 Publications.
- 6 Community Education.

Number of groups not at present directly involved in community relations work, but willing to become more involved:

21 out of the total 23 replying.

Of all the groups who replied, all except one felt that there should be more emphasis given in Northern Ireland to supporting and encouraging initiatives which have the potential to improve community relations.

When asked what was needed to facilitate and strengthen this work, groups prioritised as follows:

- 1 New funding to support projects concerned, to improve community relations.
- 2 The provision of advice, support and guidance for groups and individuals wishing to involve themselves in the improvement of community relations.
- 3 The facilitating of links between all groups working, or wishing to work in any area of community relations.
- 4 Support for new and existing community development projects.
- 5 The initiation and support of training programmes for discussion groups on topics of a sensitive political nature, and training in mediation and conflict resolution skills.
- 6 The encouragement of research into ways of promoting tolerance and understanding, and equality of opportunity.
- 7 The co-ordination and dissemination of information about existing community relations groups and activities.
- 8 Consultation with and advice to Government on any matter which may have a bearing on community relations particularly in relation to statutory bodies.
- 9 Representations on improving legislation and its enforcement aimed at promoting human rights and equality.

When groups were asked which of the above activities could best be strengthened by the creation of a new agency, they replied in order of preference as follows:

- 1 Facilitating links between groups.
- 2 Training.
- 3 Advice, support and guidance.
- 4 Co-ordination of information.
- 5 New Funds.
- 6 Representations on Legislation.
- 7 Support for community development.
- 8 Research.
- 9 Consultation with Government.

When respondents were asked to indicate which existing agencies might appropriately expand to include any of the above activities, only three existing agencies received any substantial support. They were:

Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust for funding (six groups) and possible co-ordination of information (two) Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action for training (three), representation to Government (two), and co-ordination of information (two). Universities for possible research (four).

The majority of groups saw the need for a new agency to be independent but at least partially funded by Government (38). Nine of these seeing funding responsibility split equally between Government and private sources e.g. trust funds. Eight groups thought that any new agency should be totally privately funded, and 23 groups thought that a quango type agency would be appropriate.

Groups responding to survey

Reconciliation Groups:

All Children Together
 Association of Teachers of Social and Cultural Studies
 Between
 Centre for the Study of Conflict
 Children's Holiday Scheme
 Columba Community
 Columbanus Community of Reconciliation
 Community of the Peace People/Youth for Peace
 Co-operation North
 Corrymeela Community
 Dawn
 Department of Education for Northern Ireland
 Dutch-Northern Irish Group
 Friends of Armagh Coming Together

East Belfast Community Council
Inter Church Emergency Fund for Ireland
Inter Church Group on Faith and Politics
Irish Council of Churches
Irish Council of Churches Youth Committee
Irish Ecumenical Church Loan Fund
Irish School of Ecumenics
Kilkenny Peace Group
Our Lady of Sion Centre
Peace and Reconciliation Group
Phoenix Youth and Community Projects
Prayer Enterprise and Christian Effort (PEACE)
Two Traditions Group
Ulster Project/USA
Ulster Quaker Peace Committee
Ulster Quaker Service Committee
Waterford Peace Group
Waterside Churches Committee

Other Organisations:

Action Resource Centre
Ballybeen Women's Group
Belfast Central Mission
Belfast Housing Aid
Belfast Law Centre
Boys' Brigade
Crescent Arts Centre
Department of Continuing Education, Jordanstown
Enniskillen Community Development Project
Farset Youth Project
Forum for Community Work Education
International Voluntary Service
Marriage Guidance (Northern Ireland)
Mourne Grange Community
Northern Ireland Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO)
Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust
Open University
Rupert Stanley College
Standing Conference of Youth Organisations
Ulster Farmers' Union
Ulster People's College
Women's Education Project
Workers' Educational Association