Just News
Human Rights in Northern Ireland
Jul/Aug 2007

Déjà vu meets Groundhog Day - the Section 75 Effectiveness Review

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) recently produced their final report on the effectiveness of Section 75 (see May 2006 edition of Just News) and they are currently consulting on these recommendations.

The ECNI, are required by Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act to "keep under review the effectiveness of the duties imposed by Section 75", and were therefore themselves acting in "accordance with the law" when carrying out the review.

The difficulty the ECNI faced was that the field was crowded by a number of other reviews and/or analyses of the law, most with input (including this one) from outside experts. Indeed the ink seemed barely dry on the original Equality Schemes issued in 2000 before OFMDFM instigated a review of consultation arrangements under the head of their Equality Directorate. The interminable dragging on of this review of consultation was followed almost immediately, by the "operational review" conducted by Neil Faris and the late Professor Eithne McLaughlin.

The ECNI must now step up to the plate and offer their verdict on the workings of the legislation. Their review commenced in April 2006, following on from a commitment in the 2003 Corporate Plan. The key question therefore is what has the ECNI's latest offering added to the plethora of material already out there?

From CAJ's point of view, the ECNI got the big issue right – namely, that they are not recommending a change in the law. CAJ has long been of the view that we needed full implementation of the existing law, not a new law, or a refined law, or a modified law, or an amended law.

We believe that the ECNI would be best advised to move forward vigorously and implement the law.

Discussions around whether to extend the categories to include for example socio-economic status are at best misguided. They facilitate another decade of public bodies procrastinating while they "get to grips with the changes". This does not seem to us to be a sensible way forward. We take the same view on all the other various arguments that have been put forward about ways in which the "law could be improved".

After all, changes in the law work both ways, and any opening up of the legislation would almost certainly more likely result in diminished rather than increased protection. It is somewhat unusual for CAJ to be arguing that the best thing to do in relation to a piece of legislation is to leave it alone, but that is our position in relation to Section 75.

This is not to say that we are happy with the pace and mannor of implementation of the current law.

The ECNI make a number of recommendations about how things could be improved, such as more detailed equality schemes, which focus on outcomes pertinent to the public body in question, rather than the procedural approach to equality schemes that has existed to date.

CAJ would be very supportive of this move, not least because it is what we recommended in our submissions to the public bodies when they consulted on their equality schemes back in 2000!

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Case report: Murphy v PSNI

An interesting case recently decided by the Fair Employment Tribunal of Northern Ireland suggests that the current state of police reform is far from ideal and that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) have a considerable distance to go in order to complete longstanding reforms that will guarantee fair labour and employment practices for all.

In this case, the claimant and former member of the PSNI sued his former employer for religious discrimination and wrongful dismissal from his post as a civilian photographer based at the Knocknagoney police station. The claimant, Stephen Murphy, had been employed by the Northern Irish police since 1989 by the PSNI's predecessor, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). When the RUC became the PSNI in accordance with the terms of the Good Friday/ Belfast Agreement, the claimant was retained and employed by the respondent until 8 October 2004.

In 2000, the claimant developed a project involving a new photographic system. The claimant not only was designated to head this project but also received glowing reviews from within the PSNI for its implementation. Shortly thereafter however, the claimant, a Presbyterian, became engaged to a Catholic and this fact caused the claimant's relationship to his superiors at the Knocknagoney police station to suffer. Both the PSNI Station Inspector and the Acting Sergeant commenced a campaign to dissuade the claimant from any potential marriage to his fiancée. When this did not happen, the campaign turned into one of intimidation and demotions that eventually culminated in the claimant's dismissal in October 2004.

Through his solicitor, the claimant appealed his dismissal and put his case in writing before the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB). The appeal heard in October 2005 by the NIPB resulted in the determination that the dismissal was needlessly rigid and recommended a lesser penalty along with reinstatement and an appropriate location. The finding was received negatively by the respondent, which refused to reinstate the claimant and signaled its intent to appeal the finding through the respondent's letter dated 17 January 2006 in which it rejected its findings and recommendations.

The relevant elements of the law applicable to this case are as follows:

- It is unlawful to discriminate against another on the ground of his religious belief/political opinion. (Article 3, Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998).
- Religious/political discrimination is to treat someone less favourably than another on the ground of religious belief or political opinion (Article 3(2)(a) Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998).
- To establish that a dismissal is not unfair, an employer must establish the reason for the dismissal and that it was one of the statutory reasons that can render a dismissal not unfair. If the employer meets both of these criteria, then the fairness of the dismissal depends on the determination whether the employer acted fairly and reasonably in treating the reason as sufficient grounds for dismissing the employee.
- Where an employee dismisses an employee for misconduct, s/he must have a reasonable belief that the employee has committed an act of misconduct after having carried out a reasonable investigation (including a reasonable hearing and appeals process) and dismissal must be within the range of reasonable responses.
- A breach of contract is where any term or condition, actual or implied, if the employee's contract of employment has been breached by the employer.

In issuing its findings, the Tribunal found that while grounds for the claimant's dismissal for misconduct were present, it also determined that the respondent acted unfairly and unreasonably in evaluating the grounds for the claimant's dismissal. Furthermore the Tribunal found that the disciplinary process was seriously flawed, specifically with regards to the fact that the claimant was not invited to attend a meeting with the respondent's disciplinary agent before the dismissal actions were taken. Although the respondent's letter of dismissal refers to two written invitations to the disciplinary hearings, the claimant denied ever having received such notices.

Finally, the Tribunal determined that there was no basis for determining the evaluative criteria used in disciplining the claimant nor any indication that mitigating factors were considered. As a result, the Tribunal concluded that although reinstatement was not a feasible option, it would order that the claimant be re-employed by the respondent as a civilian photographer at a mutually-agreed upon location. It furthermore ordered that the respondent retroactively pay the claimant all salary due to him dating back to October 2004.

Harold Rodriguez
visting US intern

Church, state and the rights debate

We live in interesting times - the Vatican condemns Amnesty International for its stance on abortion; the courts interpret the Human Rights Act as denying a Muslim girl's right to wear her religious attire to school; the media is full of confused and confusing debates about religion, rationality, and rights, and the supposed contradictions between them. It seems that debates about the relationship between the advocacy of human rights, and the holding of specific religious beliefs, have rarely been so contentious.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the recent judicial review of the Sexual Orientation Regulations (Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006), which outlawed discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods and services.

A range of Protestant groups – namely the Christian Institute, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Congregational Union of Ireland, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland, the Fellowship of Independent Methodist Churches, and Christian Camping International (UK) Ltd - sought to have the Regulations declared unlawful. The Catholic Church, in the form of the Northern Bishops, intervened in support of the applicants.

The respondents, namely the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), were supported in the proceedings by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and, perhaps unsurprisingly given the impact of the Regulations, the Coalition on Sexual Orientation (COSO).

Consultation

Many of the legal arguments presented in the case were relatively straightforward procedural matters focusing on whether the OFM/DFM had in fact consulted effectively prior to the introduction of the Regulations.

The churches in particular argued that basic consultation procedures had not taken place (e.g. failing to allow sufficient time for the consultation) and, that as a result, the legislation should be quashed. Indeed a number of these arguments have been raised in other cases where the issue of the outcome of a public consultation is disputed.

However some other fundamental arguments also arose, such as the wider relationship between human rights and religious belief, and the extent to which there might be an inherent conflict between deeply held religious beliefs and a commitment to human rights.

For the record, CAJ fully supported the introduction of the Sexual Orientation Regulations. We have also fully supported the rights of all the churches to be effectively consulted on the matter. Furthermore, we would see no incompatibility whatsoever between adherence to human rights principles and deeply held religious convictions.

Yet a court room is probably the least useful place to have a discussion of this kind – without disrespect to any lawyers who might be reading this comment. The nature of the adversarial legal system in which contradictory arguments are put before a judge, who then reaches a decision based, at least in part, on the skill of the advocate, does not lend itself to an adequate examination of what kind of society is being built for the future.

Inherent conflict

Human rights principles and religious beliefs do not have to play the zero-sum game. Undoubtedly there are those without religious beliefs who find a useful alternative ethical code in human rights principles. Equally, there are those who engage actively in human rights activities precisely because of their deeply held religious convictions. Indeed CAJ has been fortunate enough over the past 25 years to count a not insignificant number of both groups of people as members.

Judgment in the case was reserved and is expected some time later in the Autumn. Regardless of the outcome of this case however, there is clearly a pressing need for a full and frank discussion about how human rights and religious belief can co-exist in Northern Ireland. Such a debate will necessarily require the involvement of religious leaders, politicians and civil society in its broadest sense. Moreover, such a debate must recognise that Northern Ireland itself has changed in recent years and religious belief now extends significantly beyond the Christian faith.

Open debate

The current process around working towards and developing a Bill of Right for Northern Ireland would seem to be the obvious forum for a discussion of this kind. This would allow for an open debate with the involvement of all stakeholders, including those for whom their religious belief and the adherence to international human rights standards are two sides of the same coin.

Clearly the creation of any Bill of Rights will ultimately result in an argument between lawyers over the meaning of language in a courtroom. Such a debate should however come at the end, and not the beginning of the process.

"No normal human being w

"No normal human being wants to hear the truth" was the title of an article in the most recent issue of the "Healing Through Remembering" Bulletin (summer 2007). The author, David Tombs, described as a political theologian, asserted that any truth recovery process was unlikely to be popular. He noted that "truth is often painful….In a conflict like the one in and about Northern Ireland, a truth recovery process is likely to bring to the surface things that exist in the shadowy world of the half-known. It confronts people with truths that they would rather not know, and although they do already know them in some way, they do not want to acknowledge their truth".

These insights may help us understand better a number of setbacks to the truth recovery process recorded in recent weeks. Although largely unrelated, these various events exemplify the difficulties that public bodies face in genuinely acknowledging the truth.

1) Inquiries and the 'expense' of probing the past

There has been a recent flurry of media headlines on the expense involved in investigating the past. The public is expected to express shock and dismay in learning that "the cost of the inquiries and investigations into Ulster's past is set to pass the £300 million mark, it emerged today" (Newsletter, 26 July 2007). But surprisingly the shock and dismay that is being elicited seems to be aimed at the families of the Bloody Sunday victims, or the family of Rosemary Nelson, or at the elderly David Wright – not at those who are refusing to give these families the truth they are seeking.

Families are being actively re-traumatised. They become a political pawn – the Newsletter article pulled no punches in suggesting that it was only unionist politicians who were concerned about the expense of probing the past. Nationalist and republican politicians were – implicitly – either oblivious to the expenditures involved, or actively supportive – i.e. the inquiries and probing the past would seem to be solely a request made by nationalists and republicans. Perhaps someone needs to tell David Wright, and Raymond McCord, and David McIlwhaine …..

The insult to the families involved is compounded when politicians seek to draw a distinction between "inquiry" cases, and "innocent" victims. Again, Messrs Wright, McCord and McIlwhaine might take umbrage at any suggestion that they are not "innocent" victims as they seek to find out the truth of what happened to their loved ones.

But the most disturbing and shocking fact in the public outcry that is stoked up every time there is a discussion about inquiries, is the fact that the spotlight is not trained on those most responsible for the cost. Surely the public should be asking who decided that some lives were expendable? Who decided to facilitate cover-ups to avoid any accountability? Who decided to destroy weapons, dump files, alter records so as to hide the truth? Who decided that every step of the way should be made as difficult as possible for the victims' families when trying to find out what actually happened?

In particular, the next time news media choose to highlight the cost of addressing the past, could they 'unpack' the costs they impute? David Wright is sitting in a court-room, with a three-member legal team (senior and junior counsel and a solicitor). In serried racks, on the other side of the court-room, paid for out of taxpayers' money, are the legal teams representing the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Prison Officer Association, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Office, the Security Services, the Treasury Solicitors Office and the Crown Solicitor's Office. So, each family searching for the truth has to contend with a barrage of legal teams whose duty is to protect their (government) clients.

Few people would agree that a formal legal inquiry is the ideal way to get at the truth. It is particularly obvious that inquiries under the Inquiries Act are unsatisfactory. But what choice do families have, and is it their fault that the process is so expensive? Taxpayers seem to be expected to spend a lot more money on hiding the truth than actively seeking it.

2) External scrutiny and truth recovery mechanisms

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe is responsible for overseeing the implementation of rulings by the European Court of Human Rights. In principle, this oversight is extremely valuable, since it cannot be assumed that governments will do everything necessary to remedy past failings – either with regard to individual cases, or more general measures. There are, however, weaknesses in the system of oversight.

The exchanges take place largely in private between the Committee of Ministers and government representatives. Groups like CAJ (who legally represented three of the six cases against the UK currently being overseen by the Committee of Minsters), other legal representatives,

vants to hear the truth"

and the families, have to try and read the runes from outside the process.

The government makes claims about what is and is not happening and fails to check their assertions with the bodies (such as the Police Ombudsman)being commented upon. There is still less any attempt on the part of the government to keep families and their representatives informed of their claims.

These closed procedures create problems: there is a high risk of Europe acting on the basis of inaccurate information; families are being re-traumatised when the media door-steps them and there is a replication of the very culture of secrecy that lay at the heart of many of the human rights abuses in the first place.

3) Local mechanisms of scrutiny

One of the supposed new changes in the light of the Criminal Justice Review was that the Public Prosecution Service would more frequently give reasons for decisions not to prosecute. Failures to prosecute in the past had long fed distrust in the independence of the prosecutorial system, so the commitment to give reasons was seen as an important advance. Of course the 'giving of reasons' was still to be hedged with certain exceptions and safeguards, but there was at least a commitment to be more open and transparent. This was especially so when Article 2 of the European Convention was engaged because there may have been state involvement in the death, or ineffective action thereafter.

The out-workings of this change were seen however to disappointing effect in the recent ruling on the part of the PPS not to prosecute anyone as a result of the Stevens III investigation. On the positive side – the public and, more importantly, the family, were given some insight into the reasons for this decision. It is however highly questionable if anyone reading the full statement by the PPS would be reassured. To give just one example: the PPS (rightly) note the risk of abuse of process being cited as a defence in the event that any officials were charged at this very late stage with criminal behaviour. CAJ and many others are eager to avoid any abuse of process, but it is somewhat surprising that the PPS did not explore – at least in its public reasoning – if, and if so to what extent, its office had contributed to the inordinate delay, and therefore the difficulty of holding individuals to account.

It is difficult to see what remedies exist – though the Committee of Ministers seemed to set much store on the potential of judicial review as a safeguard. Yet again people will feel let down by the very agencies that are established and maintained to uphold the rule of law.

4) Inquiring into the past – who will bring that forward?

Government has announced the establishment of a panel to look at the past, co-chaired by Archbishop Eames and Denis Bradley. The public has been left somewhat uncertain about its remit. CAJ understands that the primary purpose of this Panel is not to engage directly in any form of truth-telling process, nor itself to address the legacy of the past. Instead the Panel will consult and report on people's views as to how that legacy might be best addressed.

Even with this narrower remit, many people may challenge the composition and legitimacy of the group, but clearly it cannot take on a more fundamental role a la Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. They will have sufficient difficulty in securing an honest and open dialogue about the options for the way forward – but at least they intend to begin that important work. CAJ will seek an early meeting and draw their attention to the human rights principles on truth that we outlined in Just News (February 2005).

It is less clear whether the systems we have already in place are going to maintain their interest. Al Hutchinson, has been appointed the new Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. In his final report as outgoing Oversight Commissioner, Mr Hutchinson opined that the focus on the past is "hindering the forward progress of policing". He expresses concern about "the continual debilitating drip-feed of speculation, inquiries and investigations into past police practice" and sets this up against the possibility of people "willing to move on". He even has a very clear vision about his new job – "As long as the Ombudsman is engaged, as required by law, in expending so many resources on determining accountability for past policing issues, the office cannot properly focus on the present and the future".

Presumably, in appointing Al Hutchinson to the Ombudsman's post, government agreed with, or were not disturbed with, this analysis of the Ombudsman's priorities. Not simply is the Ombudsman to be denied the wherewithal to look into the past, Mr Hutchinson clearly (admittedly like the Chief Constable, to judge by his frequent comments on the same subject) believes that "the past" is totally separate from "the present" and still more "the future".

To sum up, people may not want to hear the truth, but we must all acknowledge the past if we are to move to a positive future.

Book Review

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Action

Recently, *The Economist* questioned the 'new' Amnesty International suggesting that "the latest focus comes at the cost of the old one." The 'old' focus being identified with campaigns for civil and political rights (CP rights) the 'latest' focus is reflected, according to *The Economist*, in Amnesty's broadened mission embracing systemic change and the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights (ESC rights). *The Economist* echoes a widespread view, which appears to be oblivious to the fact that ESC rights are an integral part of the human rights package since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Moreover, what seems to be ignored is that our world is visibly marked by extreme inequality, which ESC rights seek to address. Almost half of our world's population have to survive with 2 US Dollars per day. and the richest 5% have incomes 114 times those of the poorest 5%.

The new 500 page volume *"Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Action"* edited by Mashood A. Baderin and Robert McCorquodale is to be highly welcomed as it elucidates an understanding and role of ESC rights. 17 cutting edge chapters by high calibre scholars of ESC rights cover critical conceptual debates of ESC rights. Their analysis manifests how ESC rights can be grounded as tools for action and transformation. The authors also elaborate on the challenges to be faced in order to improve the realisation of ESC rights in a more coherent and effective way.

The chapters are grouped under three main topics: the structure and scope of ESC rights obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; regional and comparative understandings of ESC rights; and various themes touching upon their application, including the rights to health, to social security and to development.The book makes a wide range of critical points some of which are highlighted here.

As Richard Burchill argues in his chapter on *"Democracy and the Promotion and Protection of Socio-economic rights*", "to accept the dominance of the markets and the minimalist approach to democracy and human rights is to accept the marginalization of sections of society [i.e. the poor, unemployed, sick, and the disabled] and maintain structural inequalities, something that is contrary to the foundations of democracy and human rights." In this context, Sarah Joseph's chapter on *"Trade to Live or Live to Trade"* should be mentioned. She engages, *inter alia*, in a much-needed dialogue with economic theory.

As regards the relationship between CP rights and ESC rights, Colin Warbick notes in his chapter on "*Economic and Social Interests and the European Convention on Human Rights"* that "[r]eference to economic and social interests might expand the substance of civil and political rights under the Convention – there is less evidence that this process will work in reverse."

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that three chapters are devoted to (Human) Rights-Based Approaches (RBA) as concepts able to enhance the implementation of ESC rights. In this perspective, Michael O'Flaherty examines UN treaty bodies, Patrick Twomey considers the question of development, and Paul Hunt and Gillian MacNaughton demonstrate the importance of health indicators. Fundamentally, what emerges from all three chapters is the critical importance of participation and measurement to ensure accountability. Thus, O'Flaherty argues, "RBA, predicated as it is on a process of engagement with and empowering rights-holders, suggests an important role for civil society." Similarly, Twomey emphasises that "[p]articipation in all stages of development needs to be active, free, and meaningful – including communities, civil society, and all stakeholders; mere formal consultation is not sufficient." As Hunt and MacNaugton point out, "[b]ecause participation is an essential feature of the right to health, indicators are needed to measure the degree to which health policies and programmes… are participatory." Finally, Ed Bates' discussion of the UK's reluctance to incorporate ESC into UK law could be seen as a challenge to Northern Ireland: Will Northern Ireland transcend the UK's resistance and finalise its own Bill of Rights including ESC rights? As Bates argues, "[t]here seems to be little reason why the role of the courts to secure accountable government should not be extended to protect the most fundamental aspects of certain key ESC rights under a qualified model for their incorporation." He concludes, "[i]n this way it would have a 'most practical effect in protecting the rights of the people who are most marginalised and deprived in an unequal society'."

This collection represents an erudite and major contribution to the study and practice of ESC rights. All who are committed to (and those who resist) the advancement of legal (think constitutional) frameworks guaranteeing substantive equality via ESC rights should read these fresh and impressive chapters. A change of heart cannot be excluded.

Thomas Bundschuh, Transitional Justice Institute, University of Ulster

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Action, edited by Mashood A. Baderin and Robert McCorquodale. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-19-921-790-8

Consortium meets Archbishop Tutu....

CAJ, as members of the Human Rights Consortium, met Archbishop Desmond Tutu during his recent visit to Belfast. The Nobel peace prize-winner lent his support to the Consortium's campaign by signing a postcard calling for a strong and inclusive Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Archbishop Tutu said:

"A Bill of Rights is a key instrument in protecting the rights of everyone, particularly the most vulnerable in any society. I am glad that Northern Ireland has reached this next important milestone in developing its own Bill of Rights by establishing the Bill of Rights Forum. This Forum has an important task ahead, and it is essential that it talks to everyone in Northern Ireland to find out what rights they want to see protected."

Fiona McCausland, Chairperson of the Consortium, welcomed his support and said :

> *"We are at a crucial stage in developing a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The Bill of Rights Forum, where political representatives and members from civic society are currently debating the specific rights to be included in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, is now up and running. We are glad that the Archbishop could lend his support to our campaign at this important time."*

A human rights activist to the end....

Angela Hickey, the chair of British Irish Rights Watch and CAJ member, knew that she was going to die (she experienced several recurrent bouts of cancer before her untimely death) and decided to turn this terrible event into something positive. So, having spent her life trying to make a difference, she chose to make a difference way beyond her grave also.

In July, a donation of £40,000 was made to CAJ from her estate. Her first love – British Irish Rights Watch – benefited to an even greater amount. Angela was not a rich woman by any standards, but she was deeply engaged in the fight for justice. The careful management of her personal resources and death-in-service insurance arrangements etc. allowed her to make these outstandingly generous gifts so that human rights work relating to Northern Ireland could continue apace.

CAJ marks her passing with deep regret, and will be doing its best to turn her donation into a powerful tool to carry on the work of which she was so supportive.

... and the Dalai Lama

Further recognition for the work of the Human Rights Consortium came from the Dalai Lama, who took time out of his busy schedule on his recent visit to Northern Ireland to meet members of the Consortium.

War on Terror - the lessons from Northern Ireland

This unique report from CAJ analyses the material contributed to the panel of Eminent Jurists who visited Northern Ireland last year to discuss "terrorism, counter-terrorism and human rights" and offers lessons from Northern Ireland that will have direct relevance on current debates about the war on terror and comparable situations around the world. Unless lessons from places like Northern Ireland are taken on board, advances on protecting the dignity and worth of every human being, as espoused in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, will be undermined - perhaps irretrievably. *Look out for this exciting publication in the autumn of 2007!*

Civil Liberties Diary

June 5 Judicial review brought by the Christian Institute opens in Belfast. The action is a challenge to the Sexual Orientation Anti-Discrimination Regulations that came into effect at the start of the year.

Brian Kerr in the NI Court of Appeal dismisses a legal bid to overturn current legislation which bans unmarried couples from adopting children.

June 11 The Association of Chief Police Officers finds "no evidence" that secret CIA flights carrying terrorist suspects to countries where they might be tortured had landed in the UK. This contradicts an earlier report by the Council of Europe.

June 14 Law Lords rule that British soldiers who imprison detainees during military campaigns abroad are bound by the Human Rights Act. The ruling could lead to a public inquiry into the murder of Baha Mousa in Basra in 2003.

Jane Winter of British/Irish Rights Watch expresses concern at the similarity in deaths of witnesses connected to the murder of Billy Wright. Both, John Kenneway (the previous week) and Mark Fulton (in 2002), were found dead inside Maghaberry Prison.

June 19 Rules in England and Wales governing the use of restraint techniques based on inflicting pain in privately run children's jails are to be widened to allow staff to use them to enforce discipline the Ministry of Justice announces. MPs have criticised the timing of the decision which comes before the inquest into the death of Gareth Myatt (15).

June 21 New Labour Force statistics show Catholic unemployment at 6% compared to 3% for Protestants in Northern Ireland – this despite the fact that the number of Catholics in employment has risen by 76,000 since 1992.

Security Minister Paul Goggins reveals to the House of Commons that the government expects to hit a target of 30%Catholic representation in the PSNI and so end 50:50 recruitment by March 2011.

Former Police Oversight Commissioner Al Hutchinson will be Nuala O'Loan's successor as Police Ombudsman in Northern Ireland.

June 29 The Court of Appeal overturns judge's ruling that the NI Secretary of State Peter Hain had acted unlawfully when he changed the nature of the Billy Wright murder inquiry to one held under Inquires Act

Parades Commission announces restrictions imposed upon an Orange Order march in Portadown. It was banned from going down the Garvaghy Road.

July 2 Orange Order Whiterock parade in West Belfast passes off peacefully despite criticisms of the Parades Commission from both sides involved.

July 3 Proposals aimed at stopping the exploitation of migrant workers coming to Northern Ireland is published by the NI Assembly.

July 6 Health Minister Michael McGimpsey announces the number of suicides in Northern Ireland for last year rose to 291, nearly double the averages recorded between 2000 and 2004.

July 18 In a written reply to two MLAs Secretary of State Paul Goggins states the government has no plans to amend the law on abortion in Northern Ireland.

European Commission report shows women across the EU have earned an average of 15% less than men for at least the last decade despite better academic achievements while in school. The Commissioner for Employment and Equal Opportunities described the imbalance as "absurd".

July 25 Paul Goggins reveals that the cost of inquiries into Troubles-related deaths has risen to over £220 m, including £34 million given to the Historic Enquiries Team and £178 million on the Bloody Sunday Inquiry.

July 27 NI Prison Service announces measures to redress religious imbalance in its staff make up. This would include positive action advertising.

July 30 The Police Ombudsman's Office is cleared of breaching the Official Secrets Acts following allegations of leaking sensitive information to the media.

Bill of Rights Chair Chris Sidoti calls on Northern Ireland's politicians to embark on more detailed deliberations on what should be included in such a document before the March 2008 deadline. He also dismissed claims that Belfast was the race hate capital of Europe.

July 31 Army role in Northern Ireland officially ends after 38 years.

Compiled by Mark Bassett from various newspapers.

Just News
Human Rights in Northern Ireland

Just News welcomes readers' news, views and comments.
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July/Aug issue

Title for centre pages

“No normal human being wants to hear the truth”