

Just News

Human Rights in Northern Ireland

Cory to recommend inquiries?

It has been reported in the media that Judge Peter Cory, the retired Canadian judge commissioned by the Irish and British governments to review allegations of collusion between paramilitaries and the state, has ordered public inquiries into the four cases emanating from Northern Ireland, all cases in relation to which CAJ has been active.

It was believed that the Cory report was going to be published in early December, but recent media reports have suggested that it has been delayed because the British authorities have sought significant removals from several sections.

Judge Cory has been investigating six controversial cases in both jurisdictions in the island of Ireland. One relates to the 1989 murder of Belfast solicitor, Patrick Finucane - allegedly by loyalists, assisted by elements of the RUC and Military Intelligence.

Another is the case of the murder of Loyalist Volunteer Force leader Billy Wright. He was shot dead in the Maze prison in 1997, by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), allegedly with the connivance of the prison authorities.

Judge Cory has also examined the case of the murder of CAJ Executive member and solicitor Rosemary Nelson in 1999, against whom RUC officers are alleged to have made threats.

One of Rosemary's clients was Robert Hamill who was kicked to death in Portadown in 1997 by a loyalist mob. Witnesses say that police officers in a Land Rover only yards away, failed to intervene. The governments also asked Judge Cory to examine this case.

In addition Judge Cory examined two cases which suggested collusion between the IRA and the Irish Gardai. These cases involved the killing of a senior judge from Northern Ireland and his wife (Lord and Lady Gibson) and also allegations that a former Garda Schiocana officer tipped off the IRA ahead of an ambush on two RUC officers in 1989.

Judge Cory began work in the summer of 2002 and handed over his final report to the two governments in October 2003. Both governments had committed themselves in the

Weston Park Agreement to publish the reports of the judge and comply with his recommendations. Media reports have suggested that the judge has ordered public inquiries into all the cases except the murder of the Gibsons.

CAJ is concerned with reports that the British government is seeking to change aspects of the reports relating to Northern Ireland. We are also particularly alarmed that details of the recommendations have been leaked, apparently by the British government, before any of the families had been informed of the recommendations of the judge. The terms of the Weston Park Agreement were clear: that the reports would be made public and the recommendations of the judge complied with. Families had also been given assurances that they would be informed in advance of publication. CAJ has called on the government to fulfil its commitments in this regard.

Whilst the Irish authorities have requested only minor textual changes to Judge Cory's report, reliable sources say he is angry and irritated by the British response.

He is said to have made it clear to both governments that he would write his report in such a way that he did not expect to have to make significant changes. Accordingly Judge Cory consulted the intelligence services to ensure that sources were not compromised and initially they raised few objections.

The difficulties are understood to have arisen following intervention from the Attorney General Lord Goldsmith QC.

CAJ is urging the governments to comply with their promise to publish the reports and with Cory's recommendations.

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CAJ'S Annual General Meeting

There was a good turn out for CAJ's annual meeting, which was held on 28 October 2003 at the offices of the Law Centre in Belfast. The meeting not only dealt with routine business but also offered an opportunity for members to hear something of the experiences of CAJ's own Maggie Beirne in Guyana.

Annual Report

Presenting the annual report, the outgoing chairperson Fiona Doherty traced the ways in which CAJ has changed and expanded its role over the years while remaining true to the original vision and underlying philosophy of the organisation. It was noted in particular how CAJ's expertise was being called upon in the international context – in the Middle East, the United States of America, South America etc. Another significant development is the recently negotiated waiver from Law Society regulations which will enable CAJ to act as solicitors in the domestic courts. Ongoing casework, criminal justice projects, the leading role of CAJ in the Equality Coalition and Human Rights Consortium, and the analysis of the work of policing institutions were all commended.

The annual report, which was distributed to all present, is an impressive overview of the work of CAJ.

Fiona concluded by thanking CAJ's funders to whom we are all indebted and without whom the work would be impossible. The staff of CAJ, including volunteers and interns, was commended for its commitment, the high quality of the work, and the 'encouraging environment' that permeated the work place.

Executive Committee for 2003-2004

The new executive was announced as follows:

Chair	-	Kieran McEvoy
Vice-Chair	-	Paddy Hillyard
Treasurer	-	Les Allamby
Minutes Secretary	-	Ann Godfrey
Membership Secretary	-	Fionnuala ni Aolain
Parliamentary Officer	-	Barbara McCabe
Editor of Just News	-	Lesley Emerson

When the business of the evening was concluded, CAJ's Research and Policy Officer, Maggie Beirne, addressed the members. Happily, Maggie began her presentation by sketching the geography and background context of her work. Accepting the request to serve on a policing commission for Guyana meant going to a tiny, poverty stricken, two-community, South American country. While the government is in the control of Indo-Guyanese, those in the police and army are mainly Afro-Guyanese. Since the police are poorly paid and inadequately educated financial corruption is widespread. There are many problems around human rights abuses, killings and the shooting of alleged criminals.

The inevitable outcry led to the setting up of an inquiry into pay, conditions, training, and performance of the police – including the alleged existence of a shoot to kill policy.

Guyana

Guyana, then, is no picnic. Every bit of the way has been an up-hill climb for Maggie: obtaining funding, being the only foreigner on the five-person commission and a woman to boot, complicated rules of procedure, demands for written submissions, cross examination difficulties, the absence of any exchange of views among commissioners. A report has now to be compiled for the National Assembly and a programme of action has to be proposed. As Maggie heads back to Guyana we wish her well. The outcome of the inquiry is uncertain; maybe there will be one report, or five

separate ones, or a "Guan" report and a "Beirne" report! Keep your heart up Maggie! If anyone can do it, you can.

There is also a little ray of hope in the small, under funded but very good Guyanese Human Rights Association that is working for the establishing of strong, accountable structures – structures that will encourage the excluded and women. It is trying to engage the public in this issue and broaden the debate. These pioneers are to be congratulated and supported in any way possible.

Brighde Vallely

[Editorial Note: Maggie in fact just returned prior to completing this edition of Just News - see a brief report on page 6]

“Civil Liberties in Northern Ireland: The CAJ Handbook”, 4th edition

November sees the publication of the fourth edition of the CAJ’s popular handbook, *Civil Liberties in Northern Ireland*. Six years have elapsed since the third edition, so there is obviously a lot of new material covered in the new book. Each of the former 19 chapters has been carefully revised and three wholly new chapters have been added. These deal with general equality issues, mental health and environmental rights. Particular thanks are due to Maggie Beirne, Michael Potter and Neil Faris for writing these.

As always the contributors are to be sincerely thanked for writing their chapters without any hope of reward save that of knowing that they are performing a valuable public function by making awareness of rights more widespread! This time there are 24 contributors in all, 10 of whom are new. Three former contributors – Steve McBride, Gerry McCormack and Richard Steele – will see chunks of their chapters reproduced in this new edition, but they have all been updated.

Many helpers

Having edited the three previous editions alone, I felt it was time to ask Martin O’Brien to join me for this one. He had helped a lot with earlier editions anyway. Both of us would readily acknowledge, however, that, time-consuming though the work has been for us, even more hours have been devoted to the refining of the text by the large number of volunteer proof-readers, indexers and compilers of tables who kindly lent a hand after the final versions of the chapters were delivered earlier this year.

Pre-eminent amongst these helpers, as ever, was Liz McAleer. Liz has in many ways been the lynch-pin of the book’s production ever since its first edition in 1990. Because of her central role in the book’s production Martin and I both felt it appropriate to dedicate this edition to the memory of her dear husband Gerry McAleer.

The book is intended to be a guide, in fairly accessible terms, to the law and practice affecting the exercise of our civil liberties across a range of different areas. Rather than offering a detailed critique of each area, it focuses on setting out what the current legal position is. The text aims to be up-to-date as of 1 March 2003, but occasionally it includes more recent developments. The book explains, amongst other matters, what our rights are if we are arrested and detained, how our complaints against the police are handled (the system is very different from six years ago), what the position of immigrants and asylum-seekers is, whether we have full rights to free speech and access to information, when we can complain of unlawful discrimination, what rights are accorded to our children (especially to education), what entitlements we have to social security benefits, what our rights are when we are in employment and what our position is if we become homeless. Almost one-half of the book could be said to be devoted to social and economic rights. But there is a great deal else besides.

New Legislation

Amongst the new legislation that has had to be taken into account is the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Police (NI) Acts 1998, 2000 and 2003, the Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1999, the Terrorism Act 2000, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the

Family Law Act (NI) 2001, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, the Justice (NI) Act 2002, the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2003 and the Access to Justice (NI) Order 2003.

But the most significant law passed during the last few years, of course, has been the Human Rights Act 1998, which incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into the law of Northern Ireland. References are made to the impact of this Act in virtually every chapter of the new handbook. The European Convention is given some extended treatment in chapter 2, which has been retitled “Victims’ Rights” rather than simply “Remedies”.

Because of the pressure on space none of the contributors was able to be as detailed as he or she wanted to be, but there is a section on “Further Reading” for those who want to go deeper into any topic. And for the first time we have included references to websites in the lists of addresses.

The fourth edition weighs in at more than 600 pages and at a cost of £9.50 must surely be excellent value for anyone who needs to know more about his or her civil rights in Northern Ireland. As Lord Lester kindly says in the Foreword, it is the sort of book which is also needed in the other jurisdictions of the United Kingdom (and in the Republic of Ireland too perhaps). It will be available to buy from most High Street bookshops or directly from the CAJ. The CAJ’s website carries further information about the book’s content.

Brice Dickson

CAJ Publishes the First Review to Date on the

Over the next year, CAJ plans on publishing a series of commentaries analysing the work of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Policing Board, the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the District Policing Partnerships. CAJ recently published the first commentary in this series, which focuses on the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

Commentary on the Policing Board

The commentary on the Policing Board is divided into two sections. The first section gives an overview of the work of the Policing Board, highlighting examples of both good and bad practice to date, with a particular emphasis on the issues of accountability and transparency. The second section addresses particular case studies that illustrate how the Policing Board's approach to accountability and transparency has affected the way in which the Board has handled current policing issues of importance in Northern Ireland. In conclusion, CAJ brings together a series of recommendations that we believe could assist in ensuring greater accountability and improving the transparency of the Policing Board. CAJ has produced the commentary in a constructive spirit and hopes the Policing Board will find the recommendations useful in meeting its duty under the Police Act 2000 to make "*arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions, and those of the Chief Constable, are exercised . . .*"

The Patten Commission recommended that a new institution called the Policing Board be established to replace the Police Authority for Northern Ireland. The Patten Commission called for the Policing Board to be granted more powers than its predecessor and see its primary function as holding the Chief Constable publicly to account. The Policing Board has quickly established itself as a more accountable and powerful body than the Police Authority. The scale of the challenge facing the Policing Board was and is clearly enormous and the commentary addresses some of the successful decisions the Board has made and the early controversies the Board has managed since its establishment on 4 November 2001. For example, the Policing Board has decided on a new emblem for the PSNI; appointed the Chief Constable, Hugh Orde; issued a number of major documents, such as a code of ethics for the Police Service of Northern Ireland; and appointed over 200 people as independent members of the District Policing Partnerships, which are tasked with providing police accountability at the local level.

At the same time, CAJ believes the Policing Board should make a number of changes in the way it operates to improve its ability to hold the Police Service to account and

increase its transparency. The Policing Board must engage with statutory bodies, non-governmental and community organisations and the public much more proactively, and demonstrate that it is providing effective and systematic police accountability.

Holding the Police Service Publicly to Account

The Patten Commission recommended that the primary function of the Policing Board should be to "*hold the Chief Constable and the police service publicly to account*" (para. 6.3, emphasis added). The premise of this recommendation is that Board must hold the police to account and be seen by the public to hold the police to account. This can be achieved in a number of ways. CAJ believes that one such way is for the Policing Board to better utilise the public meetings it holds with the Chief Constable. According to statistics from the Omnibus Survey that were recently published by the Policing Board, only 18% of the public is aware that the Policing Board holds monthly public meetings. The Policing Board could make changes to the format and substance of the meetings to promote accountability and transparency. Currently, public meetings of the Policing Board are held at midday at the offices of the Policing Board in Clarendon Dock in Belfast. This may be a suitable time for people working in central Belfast who can forego their lunchtime, but is clearly not suitable for a wide range of people, who cannot attend daytime meetings. There have been few if any public meetings with the Chief Constable organised by the Board outside Belfast, as recommended by the Patten Commission, nor indeed outside of the Policing Board's offices. To increase public participation in the public meetings, the Policing Board should better publicise its public meetings and rotate them at different times of the day and week and at different venues throughout Northern Ireland.

People may also be more interested in attending the public meetings and would understand better how the Policing Board is holding the police to account, if the Board conducted more of its business in public. Currently, the public meetings sometimes begin with a topical presentation by the Police Service, followed by a short statement by the Chief Constable on topics which appear to be of his choosing, and then some questions by Board members, in which the speaker and question are known in advance. It would be preferable if the Policing Board would also debate, set standards, make decisions, and systematically evaluate PSNI performance during the public meetings. There will of course be occasions when the Policing Board will need to meet in private. This should be the exception, however,

Work of the Northern Ireland Policing Board

rather than the rule. The Board could also increase public participation by formulating and disseminating a formal procedure that allows members of the public to direct questions to the Chief Constable through Board members.

CAJ also recommends in its commentary that the Policing Board come to an agreement with the Chief Constable on a format for his reports to the Board at the public meetings. The Chief Constable should be asked to report on current issues of his choosing but also routinely on positive and negative developments related, for example, to human rights generally, including implementation of the Patten Commission recommendations and compliance with the PSNI code of ethics and neutral environment policy. The Chief Constable should also be asked to present the PSNI's quarterly reports towards the objectives in the policing plan during the public meetings.

Transparency

The Patten Commission recommended that the Policing Board "*coordinate its work closely with other agencies whose work touches on public safety, including education, environment, economic development, housing and health authorities, as well as social services, youth services and the probation service, and with appropriate non-governmental organisations*" (para. 6.10). To date the Policing Board, in CAJ's opinion, has failed to consult and engage sufficiently with statutory organisations, including the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, non-governmental organisations and the public. To our knowledge, the Board has not yet completed a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the Human Rights

Commission nor issued an official response to the Human Rights Commission's evaluation of police recruit training, which was published in November 2002. The full Board does not meet regularly with the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and, if CAJ's experience is indicative, non-governmental organisations also do not have easy access to the Board. Recently released data indicates that only 23% of the public believes the Policing Board is performing 'well' or 'very well' in consulting with the public about policing issues. In its commentary, CAJ calls on the Policing Board to improve its outreach and proactively seek substantive feedback from statutory agencies, non-governmental and community organisations and the public on the performance of the police.

The Board must also make the public more aware of its work so that people can have confidence that the Board is holding the police to account. According to the Policing Board's research, only 45% of the public believes the

Policing Board performs 'well' or 'very well' in its monitoring of the PSNI. In addition to the changes in the public meetings highlighted above and the press releases and documents the Board does produce, CAJ recommends that the Policing Board do more to publicise its work. It should in particular publicise information about what issues it pursues with the PSNI, what standards it sets, and its evaluation of PSNI implementation towards Board targets.

Case Studies

CAJ's commentary on the Policing Board also addresses case studies which illustrate how the Board's approach to accountability and transparency has affected the way it has handled a variety of the following current policing issues of importance: the monitoring of PSNI operations, policy, and practice; the endorsement of CS Spray; the Omagh bomb investigation; implementation of recommendations related to PSNI recruit training published by the Human Rights Commission in November 2002; the Board's production of the Policing Plan 2003-2006; PSNI monitoring of sectarian crime and incidents; and the functioning of the District Policing Partnerships.

CS Spray

To take just one of the seven case studies, the commentary makes suggestions that CAJ believes would have improved the way the Policing Board handled, for example, the issue of CS Spray. The Police Service came to the Policing Board with a proposal to acquire CS Spray and on 6 February 2003, the Policing Board released a press statement indicating it had endorsed the PSNI proposal. The Board did not discuss the proposal at its public meeting of the same day and did not inform the public how it had reached its decision. The public were left not knowing on what information the Policing Board based its decision – whether it relied only on information provided by the Police Service or whether it considered independent data. If it had examined the latter, the Board would have been made aware that there are adverse health effects with the use of CS spray, that to date there has been limited research into its safety, especially its long-term effects, and also that officers have been injured while being trained in its use. CAJ argues in its commentary that it is not too late for the Policing Board to conduct a more thorough review of CS Spray. Particularly on such a contentious issue as new weaponry, the Board should consult widely, review all data on CS Spray, make the data public, and publicly debate and decide on the benefits of CS Spray. If the decision is to endorse CS Spray, the Board should make acquisition of CS Spray conditional on the Board's review of the guidelines and training the PSNI implement.

Copies of this report can be obtained from our website, www.caj.org.uk, or by contacting CAJ's office.



Homeward Bound!

My Guyana sojourn is over and I have returned to Northern Ireland with a variety of different, often contradictory, impressions about the potential for policing change there.

In September 2003 Just News, I reported that I had been invited to serve on a Patten-type Commission of Inquiry into Policing in Guyana, the only English-speaking county in South America. I worked with my colleagues (4 Guyanese nationals including a former army brigadier, former attorney general, current judge in the court of appeal and a young lawyer) to produce an Interim Report for the National Assembly, and this has just been completed. Since the rest of the work will concentrate on services other than the police (fire, prison, and army), I have tendered my resignation, and am now back to apply the experience to CAJ's work here in Northern Ireland.

In some ways, the experience and practice of policing is very different in Guyana. Police pay is extremely low, and is often cited as one of the reasons that so many police officers (especially traffic police) engage regularly in bribery. Accommodation is poor also – with most police officers housed in barracks on site, and sometimes in very inhospitable locations in the interior of the country (Guyana's population is by and large settled along the Atlantic coastline, but it has a vast under-populated hinterland). And the level of drug-related crime is both great and on the increase. As a natural through-route to the Caribbean and Europe for drugs produced in neighbouring countries, the chances of Guyana becoming a haven for ever more organised crime are very high. These were some of the challenges facing our Commission: how does one pay, train, and prepare the police to act as a much more efficient and professional body, able to effectively counter armed and dangerous criminals.

There were also some challenges that seemed familiar to anyone coming from Northern Ireland: how does one create a police service that is truly representative of the society as a whole, and not just one group within society (in this case the minority Afro-Guyanese, rather than all the ethnic groups within the country). How does one establish human rights as the crucial principle which dictates police action on the street? Unfortunately, the reaction of a poorly paid, poorly trained and unprofessional body has been to kill alleged criminals rather than arrest them and ensure them due process. The Commission had to examine training, complaints mechanisms, the legislative framework for the use of force, the operation of the coroners' system, and many other such mechanisms, to arrive at a series of recommendations to address these serious human rights abuses.

Whilst I cannot say that the experience was particularly enjoyable – it was certainly worthwhile. I intend when the

dust settles to write more extensively about the experience and draw out some of the interesting parallels. I certainly have returned confirmed in the belief enunciated in CAJ's major policing report (Human Rights on Duty) that "policing problems in Northern Ireland are similar to those that confront other countries, and differ more in degree than in nature". I am also clear that it is political will which determines whether policing change will be successful or not. It will be fascinating to see to what extent Guyana's politicians are willing to "run with the ball" now that the Commission has done its work.

Guyana is a beautiful country, with the most hospitable of people, and I do fervently hope that the work of the Commission has contributed something towards laying the foundations for the kind of efficient, professional and human-rights compliant police service that the country deserves.

Maggie Beirne

Must do better: CAJ's verdict on R.E. syllabus proposals

Recently a consultation document was circulated on the revised core syllabus on religious education in schools. The four main Christian church leaders were asked to establish a Working Party to undertake a review of this RE core syllabus, and they appointed a 22-member group. All 22 represent either Catholic or Protestant churches, and the Working Group is jointly chaired by a Protestant and Catholic representative. A "world religions" sub-group was established, presumably to look beyond Protestantism and Catholicism, but there was no formal representation of any non-Christian faith on the group.

CAJ and others have expressed serious reservations about the end-product because it seems to reflect the narrow composition of the working group. There appears to have been little or no outreach to non-Christian groups, and indeed we understand that offers of assistance by non-Christian groups to get involved were disregarded. This is to ignore the reality of religious belief in Northern Ireland, and still less in the world generally. Moreover, the syllabus as a whole would have benefited from much greater input throughout from groups working on issues such as gender, sexual orientation, disability and others, given the likely equality implications.

For copies of CAJ's response, contact the office.

Dublin and Monaghan bombings

The report into the 1974 bombings of Dublin and Monaghan by Justice Henry Barron is expected in early December 2003.

The bombings took place on 17th May 1974, leaving 33 people dead and over 240 injured. The Irish police, An Garda Síochána, has concluded on the balance of probabilities that the bombings were carried out by northern loyalists. Three bombs went off in Dublin during the afternoon rush hour, within minutes of one another. The fourth bomb exploded later in Monaghan. The vehicles used for the car bombs were all hijacked in Northern Ireland and driven over the border. The Dublin bombs indicated a degree of sophistication never attained by loyalists before or since.

The Dublin and Monaghan bombings took place at a very turbulent time in Northern Ireland's, and indeed Ireland's, history. In January 1974 the power-sharing executive agreed under the Sunningdale Agreement took office. Northern loyalists were bitterly opposed to the Agreement. Although brokered by a Conservative government in Britain, the Agreement was also backed by the new Labour government that came to power in February 1974. Loyalist opposition intensified, fuelled by fears that Labour was in favour of a united Ireland. On 15th May 1974, the Ulster Workers Council commenced an all-out strike against the Agreement in the north, which swiftly brought down the power-sharing executive and brought the Agreement to an end. The Dublin and Monaghan bombings happened two days later, on the third day of the strike.

Both An Garda Síochána and the RUC were involved in the police investigation. At first co-operation between them was good, but within a fortnight of the bombings the investigation seemed to peter out. The inquiry by Judge Barron also

encountered difficulty in obtaining answers from the Northern Ireland authorities about what they knew.

So far as the Gardaí was concerned, there was no prior intelligence about the bombings. The situation in Northern Ireland was exceptionally tense. All arms of the British intelligence services - RUC, army and MI5/6 - must have been on full alert. The various loyalist groups were heavily infiltrated by the security forces' intelligence services. A Yorkshire Television documentary broadcast in 1993 alleged that two of the eight loyalists they named as having been involved were paid security force informers at the time of the bombings.

The Irish government at the time was surprisingly unperturbed by the bombings themselves and by the lack of progress in the police investigation. On 20th May 1974 the government announced that there would be no national day of mourning for the victims of the bombings and that flags on public buildings would not fly at half mast during the victims' funerals. The hurt caused by this decision is unimaginable. When 13 people died and 14 were injured on Bloody Sunday in Derry on 30th January 1972, the Irish government declared a day of mourning, yet in the nation's capital and in Monaghan, with many more deaths and injuries inflicted, there was to be no similar mark of respect. Wiser counsels must have prevailed, for the next day the government partially changed its mind and declared that on the 22nd of May the national flag would be flown at half mast on public buildings in Dublin and Monaghan as a mark of respect.

However, until the current administration decided to refer the case to Chief Justice Hamilton (replaced after his untimely death by Judge Barron), four years ago, those dipped flags were the last sign of any official concern at all for the victims, who have succeeded in reaching this stage entirely by their own efforts.

Judge Barron's inquiry has taken place behind closed doors. Although it has ranged both far and wide, the victims' only role has been as witnesses. They have had no opportunity to test or evaluate the other evidence collected by the judge. His inquiry was obviously the model for that conducted by the Canadian judge Peter Cory into six cases where collusion is alleged, and neither investigation is a substitute for a public inquiry.

Judge Barron's report will not make recommendations, as we understand it, although we understand that he has come to some firm conclusions about what happened. He will simply report on what he has found. It will then be a matter for a joint committee of the Oireachtas to decide whether or not a public inquiry is warranted. Those of us who have examined the facts ourselves are in no doubt that such an inquiry is required, and not before time – the victims have been waiting for almost thirty years.

Jane Winter

Director, British Irish Rights Watch

In the Headlines

CAJ holds newspaper clippings on more than 50 civil liberties and justice issues (from mid 1987- December 2000). Copies of these can be purchased from CAJ office.

The clippings are also available for consultation in the office.

Anyone interested in this service, should phone (028) 9096 1122.

Civil Liberties Diary

Oct 3 Courts will be given new powers to punish crimes motivated by sectarianism, racism and homophobia more severely according to the Secretary of State Paul Murphy announced today. Judges will also be able to pass harsher sentences where criminals base their actions on hatred.

Following concerns raised by an officer of the Forensic Science Agency, the Police Ombudsman has been called in to examine claims that police officers asked forensic scientists to cover up their mistakes.

Oct 6 A new book, by journalists Hugh Jordan and David Lister, claim that Johnny Adair hijacked the taxi used by the loyalist killers who murdered solicitor Pat Finucane. This is the first time that the former UDA leader has been linked with the killing.

Oct 8 Judge Peter Cory has handed his reports on alleged cases of collusion to the British and Irish governments with a clear warning that his text should not be altered. The judge pledged to hold the government to its commitment to carry out public inquiries in any cases he recommended. Six controversial cases, including the killings of solicitors Pat Finucane and Rosemary Nelson, were investigated. Calls were made by rights activists, including the CAJ, for early action on the contents of the reports and no delay in their publication.

Oct 13 Taoiseach Bertie Ahern has said that the Cory Report could contain "very serious" information about collusion of the security forces with both republicans and loyalists. He promised that he is committed to investigating promptly any of the issues raised by the reports.

Oct 14 A 34-year-old man was questioned about the murder of solicitor Pat Finucane by detectives belonging to a team headed by London Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens. The man will be questioned about allegations that

loyalists working as agents for the military intelligence and RUC Special Branch were involved in the murder.

Oct 16 The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission responded to sustained criticism by publishing an action plan to show the Commission's commitment to the promotion of the human rights in Northern Ireland. The action plan calls for further consultation on a Bill of Rights, including a round-table forum on the Bill, more resources from the government and increased powers.

Oct 21 Unionist politicians called for a fresh examination of the circumstances surrounding the murder of LVF leader Billy Wright. Concerns were raised that his killing in the Maze Prison in 1997 had not been investigated properly.

Oct 21 High levels of public dissatisfaction with policing in Northern Ireland were revealed in a major survey, stating that the main issues of concern involve house break-ins and speeding. The survey was the largest public consultation of its kind ever carried out in NI and had led to senior commanders being told to get more officers onto the streets to quicken responses to such crimes.

Oct 21 Remains found on a beach in Co Louth were confirmed by Irish police to be those of Jean McConville, 37, who was abducted by the IRA in West Belfast in 1972. The family of Mrs McConville have called for the IRA to apologise for the murder.

Oct 24 Leaders of the Prison Officer's Association (POA) are to recommend strike action in protest at attacks on officers at Maghaberry Prison. Despite such strikes being in breach of the law, representatives insisted that they did not want to wait until someone was killed or seriously injured during such attacks.

Oct 28 Relatives of some of those killed during the Troubles called for answers from the groups who targeted

then to help them through a "collective grieving process". A new consultation paper on "Truth Mechanisms" was launched at Linenhall Library, by a number of NGOs led by Relatives for Justice.

The launch marks the start of a six-month consultation process during which time the groups and individuals involved hope to develop an official truth process. It is hoped that an independent panel or commission based on one of three possible models will be established. Victims will submit requests for an investigation into a death; injury or house raid and the panel will publish a public report on the outcome.

Oct 28 The family of two brothers shot dead by the UVF have called for a public inquiry into the activities of loyalist boss Billy Wright amid claims that he was a British agent. The allegations have been reviewed by retired Canadian Judge Peter Cory, his findings are currently being reviewed by the British and Irish governments.

Compiled by Sophie Orr from various newspapers.



Just News welcomes readers' news, views and comments.

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Correspondence should be addressed to the Editor, **Fionnuala Ni Aolain**, CAJ Ltd.

45/47 Donegall Street, Belfast BT1 2BR
Phone (028) 9096 1122

Fax: (028) 9024 6706

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