

# Just News

Bulletin of the Committee on the Administration of Justice

## Editorial

An amazing initiative is underway in Northern Ireland! People everywhere are being asked what rights they think they should have, what rights they think others should have, what should be done when their rights and those of others conflict. The agreed product of this exercise will be a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

In 1995, when the peace process was in its infancy, CAJ organised a major conference which evolved a Human Rights Agenda for Change. The opening challenge of that Agenda for Change bears repeating:

*"Regardless of any political, religious, economic and cultural differences, all human beings are entitled to certain basic rights. The international community has drawn up minimum standards of behaviour for governments and defined certain rights as inalienable, given the inherent dignity of the human being. Governments themselves have agreed that this independent body of principles should guide their behaviour both in times of peace and war.....Respect for human rights must be the cornerstone of any credible peace process if we are to move towards a more pluralist and more just society".*

CAJ's Annual General Meeting  
will take place on

Tuesday, 24th October 2000 at  
7.30 pm at the Law Centre,  
124 Donegall Street, Belfast

*All members welcome*

There followed an 18 point action programme. The action programme gave pride of place to the need to enact a Bill of Rights and the need for a broad public debate about the text of that Bill of Rights. While recognising that there are many important discussions underway at the moment - for example, on policing, criminal justice, on equality, on economic policy etc. - the importance of the Bill of Rights lies in the contribution that it can make to all of these separate debates, and many others.

Debating and agreeing a Bill of Rights allows people to develop a consensus on the rights

framework that they want to pervade everything else. As the 1995 Human Rights Agenda for Change declared *"only by building any settlement on the foundation of human rights can we hope to build a new and peaceful society, where all are respected and where equality of treatment is guaranteed"*.

This issue of Just News includes several different articles on the Bill of Rights. We hope it will encourage readers to think how they can contribute to the public debate which the N.I. Human Rights Commission will be organising over the Autumn.

## A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The protection of human rights in Northern Ireland is a key part of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. That Agreement provided for the creation of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. The Commission has a general duty to promote and protect the full range of human rights in Northern Ireland. It also has been given the specific task of making recommendations to the Secretary of State on what should be contained in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

The proposed Bill of Rights will make provision for the protection of rights which are not already protected under the European Convention on Human Rights, which will be part of our law from October 2000. The Good Friday Agreement specifies that the Bill should reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland and the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem and that it should draw on international instruments and experience. It also says that the Bill is

to be enacted by legislation at Westminster. The full text of this part of the Agreement is set out below.

*contd on page 3*

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## ***Policing in Northern Ireland - a progress (?) report***

**If one were only studying governmental public pronouncements on the Patten policing legislation, it would be very easy to wonder what all the fuss is about!**

Peter Mandelson in a January statement to the House of Commons reiterated Mo Mowlam's commitment in principle to implement the Patten report. At the Second Reading in the Commons in June, he responded to early but trenchant public criticisms of the draft legislation by urging people to move beyond rhetoric and hyperbole and recognise that "in spirit as well as letter, (government is) implementing the (Patten) commission's report". In July, after extensive discussion and substantive amendment in Committee, the NIO press statement was entitled "Government Fulfils Pledges on Patten". Similar assurances of government's commitment to put Patten into practice were forthcoming at the time of the Second Reading in the Lords just before the summer recess. If one were to believe the public pronouncements - the government supports Patten and is by-and-large doing all it can to translate Patten into legislative form.

For those beyond Northern Ireland, there is an additional spin which is that the government is working hard to implement Patten in the face of the usual intransigence of competing nationalist and unionist demands which makes progress so difficult. CAJ's reading of the situation is very different.

To take the latter point first. What issue - apart from the obvious one of symbols - divides nationalists and unionists in any real sense? Human rights training, effective accountability and a more diverse police service are objectives shared by and large by both unionists and nationalists. The legislation to date must create doubt as to whether these goals are genuinely shared by government and the policing establishment.

If government does want to implement Patten, why at this very late stage, and having already been forced to introduce more than 52 substantive changes, is it still resistant to a whole range of important safeguards which Patten called for? Why is it impossible to get government agreement to include references in the legislation to international human rights norms and standards beyond the Human Rights Act? Why does the government refuse to accept that the NI Human Rights Commission could play a useful role in advising on the guidance for public order equipment? Why are effective inquiry powers for the Policing Board consistently opposed? Why is the Secretary of State so adamant that the Police Ombudsperson cannot have the powers to investigate police policies and practices that Patten called for? Why was the appointment of the Oversight Commissioner so long delayed, and why is his term of office so curtailed in the legislation?

Not one of these issues could be said to divide nationalist and unionist, yet they clearly divide those who want to protect the police from external scrutiny, and those who want to open the police up to greater such scrutiny. CAJ believes that the police in any society must be subject to effective oversight, and we will continue to lobby government to ensure that the necessary changes are made in the final stages of negotiation around the legislation.

While the Lords debate gives us a further opportunity to secure those changes, the over-riding concern must be the level of genuine government commitment to change. A government minister in the course of the parliamentary debate resisted various amendments that sought to make reference to international human rights and standards. He said that: "*Some appalling human rights abuses...take place around the world. Those low standards should not be compared with the past activities of the RUC or with those of the police service that we want to create from the Patten proposals. The RUC carried out a difficult job, often in impossible circumstances. Such comparisons as might be made in the light of the amendment could cause unnecessary offence. We might reasonably say that, against the norms in question, the RUC has a good record on human rights.*"

Government appears to reject out-of-hand the many reports by the United Nations and respected international non-governmental organisations, thereby explaining the legislation's failure to take on several Patten recommendations which attempt to address the legacy of the past. Moreover, in its determination to avoid any appearance of impugning past RUC behaviour, the government appears unwilling to write into law clear human rights standards for future policing arrangements.

So, the signs are not good, but hopefully the summer break has given government an opportunity to re-think its stance. It is in everyone's interest that we use the opportunity provided by the Good Friday Agreement to develop a police service that commands the confidence of everyone in the community, because it is representative, accountable, and respectful of human rights.

***Maggie Beirne***

### **In the Headlines**

The CAJ holds newspaper clippings on more than 50 civil liberties and justice issues (from mid 1987). Copies of these can be purchased from the CAJ office. The clippings are also available for consultation at the office.

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

## A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland contd.....

**The new Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission will be invited to consult and to advise on the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights, to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, drawing as appropriate on international instruments and experience. These additional rights are to reflect the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem, and – taken together with the ECHR – to constitute a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.**

Among the issues for consideration by the Commission will be:

- the formulation of a general obligation on government and public bodies fully to respect, on the basis of equality of treatment, the identity and ethos of both communities in Northern Ireland; and
- a clear formulation of the rights not to be discriminated against and to equality of opportunity in both the public and private sectors.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is committed to carrying out the widest possible consultation on what should be included in the proposed Bill of Rights. In order to do so effectively, it is essential that organizations such as the CAJ are able to cooperate with the Commission and to share their expertise and networks. The Commission, although created by statute, has limited resources at its disposal and it is therefore necessary to engage with a range of organizations to elicit their views and ideas.

To this end the Commission has established a series of working groups to work on the particular rights that might be included in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. These are: Equality; Education; Criminal Justice; Children and Young People; Social and Economic Rights; Victims' Rights; Language Rights; Culture and Identity; and Implementation.

Each of the groups is supported by a member of staff and a Commissioner and comprises people active on the relevant issues from across Northern Ireland. Ideally these groups will provide advice to the Commission by the end of November 2000 on how the particular rights assigned to their group might be described in a Bill of Rights. The implementation group will, in parallel to the substantive debates, advise on how the Bill might be delivered and might work in practice.

In addition to the working groups the Commission is undertaking a range of activities designed to encourage input from as many people and organizations as possible. There are problems to be overcome in this exercise: not

everyone in Northern Ireland is familiar with the concept of a Bill of Rights and feels able to contribute usefully to the debate. The Commission, through its education programme, plans to train at least 300 facilitators over a two day course on what is meant by a Bill of Rights and how it is possible to take part in the consultation process. A training manual and accompanying video have been produced, which will be made freely and widely available to the trained facilitators and others who wish to use the materials within their own networks. A series of pamphlets has been produced that are designed to inform the debate on each of the 9 areas reflected in the working groups. Other publications that give a more general introduction to the issues will also be available.

It is also important to register that a Bill of Rights will affect *everyone* in Northern Ireland and there is a huge awareness raising effort needed in this respect. The Commission is working in each local authority area and with the various sectors, public, private, voluntary, community, trade unions, churches, political parties, to ensure that as much information as possible is made available and that it is as easy as possible to contribute ideas to the process. Public meetings advertised locally in the press, on billboards, radio and, if possible financially, on television, will seek to encourage participation - as will direct contact with the various networks that exist across Northern Ireland.

The CAJ has been at the forefront of the call for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland for many years. Now that there is a real opportunity to suggest how that can be achieved it is important that everyone in the field cooperates and contributes individually to that process. Not only in preparing advice and consulting on that advice, but especially after the advice has been given, most probably by the summer of 2001, it will be important to track the progress and elicit support for the recommendations made.

If anyone is interested in accessing any of the Commission's publications or attending a training course or simply in finding out more about the work of the Commission, either on a Bill of Rights or more generally, please don't hesitate to contact the NIHRC offices at Temple Court, 39 North Street, Belfast 1.

**Paddy Sloan, Chief Executive NIHRC**

### Action Column

#### What does a Bill of Rights mean to you?

**If after reading the various articles in this issue on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, you feel inspired to offer your opinion on what should be included in this very important piece of legislation, or you would like to help in the CAJ campaign, please contact Aideen Gilmore at the office, 45,47 Donegall Street, Belfast BT1 2BR.**

## CAJ's response to the Report

**CAJ made a lengthy submission to the Criminal Justice Review in October 1998. We also made two further submissions on specific cases and their consequences. In addition we met with the Review for a more detailed discussion of our proposals. We also organised, in conjunction with the International Commission of Jurists, a seminar for members of the Review which was hosted by the Human Rights Centre at Queen's University Belfast.**

While we have criticisms of the report of the Review, and particularly its refusal to engage with the issue of emergency laws, generally CAJ welcomed the report and particularly its reliance on human rights principles.

However, we are concerned, in light of what has happened to the recommendations of the Patten report (see page 2), that the elements of the Criminal Justice Review's Report which hold out the promise of real change will be subject to dilution before they are implemented by way of legislation or otherwise. The experience of Patten suggests that the changes recommended by the Review will be the ceiling rather than the floor of the process of change to the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland.

### Implementation

In this context we are disappointed that the implementation of the report's recommendations have been left solely in the hands of the civil service. The absence of any independent element in the implementation of the report makes its recommendations all the more vulnerable to dilution and to the opposition of elements within the existing criminal justice system which are firmly opposed to some of the more far-reaching changes suggested.

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This is all the more unsatisfactory given that the Review was government led and that the recommendations of the Review were subject to comment by relevant government departments and others in advance of publication. Indeed we understand it was this process that led to much of the delay in the publication of the Review.

In light of this we believe that any dilution of the final recommendations of the Review on the part of government would be unacceptable. We also believe that the dangers posed to the Review by virtue of the fact that their implementation is solely in the hands of the government means that those responding to the Review should make it clear that a mechanism should be put in place to maintain an independent input into the implementation process. We believe that the presence of an independent element will act as a safeguard for the recommendations of the Review.

### Court services

On the substantive issues, CAJ is concerned that the terms of reference of the Review may have discouraged any reflection on the past record of judges in Northern Ireland with regard to the protection of human rights (though it is also notable that the Review does not seem to report receiving many views on this in the consultation process). CAJ is concerned that, although Northern Ireland's courts have given a number of decisions upholding human rights, their overall record in the past thirty years demonstrates excessive deference to the interests of the executive. In cases involving inquests, emergency laws (notably in respect of confessions and access to defence lawyers) and the use of lethal force by the security forces, we are concerned that courts have failed to give sufficient weight to human rights arguments. As has been noted by leading academics, Northern Irish courts have overall adopted a restrictive approach to arguments invoking the ECHR, something which bodes ill for the introduction of the Human Rights Act.<sup>1</sup> Equally we believe this approach bodes ill for the approach of the judiciary to the new Bill of Rights. Given this record, and the centrality of human rights to the new dispensation in Northern Ireland, we believe it is imprudent to leave the current judiciary sole responsibility for interpreting the new Human Rights Act, Bill of Rights and other protections. It is therefore our firm view that a new Constitutional Court needs to be established to deal with cases involving these issues and give guidance to the existing judiciary on the protection of rights.

### Prosecution system

The recommendations of the Review in relation to the prosecution system are amongst the most far-reaching in the Report. If fully implemented, we believe they would transform the current arrangements for the prosecution

## of the Criminal Justice Review

system. However the Review does not appear to have actually examined files in the office of the DPP relating to a number of the controversial cases outlined in our submission (Pat Finucane, Robert Hamill, Nora McCabe, John Stalker etc). Nevertheless it is apparent that the Review has addressed some of the difficult issues raised by the cases we highlighted and those mentioned by others. We acknowledge that the views shared by us and others about these cases were reflected in the section dealing with the consultation exercise. We remain concerned however that if these cases are not resolved they will continue to cast a shadow over the new Prosecution Service envisaged by the Review. We are strongly of the view that satisfactory resolution of these cases in the context of institutional and personal accountability is essential if the new Prosecution Service is to command public confidence.

### Restorative justice

While CAJ has not been very active on the issue of restorative justice, we were keen to ensure that all such schemes should act lawfully, non-violently and within strict human rights parameters. We were concerned that the Review recommended that such projects should only receive referrals from statutory criminal justice agencies rather than the community, and that the police should be informed of such referrals. Surely one of the key strengths of restorative justice is its close relationship with local communities. If local restorative justice projects are acting non-violently, lawfully, and have been properly trained to protect the rights of all participants,

we cannot understand why local communities should not be able to directly take advantage of restorative justice service in their area.

We would strongly urge that this recommendation be reconsidered. As we argued in our initial submission, relations between community projects acting in a lawful and non-violent fashion and statutory agencies will best develop at a natural pace, and in an organic fashion. Partnership cannot be imposed, it must be encouraged and nurtured at the pace of the local communities themselves.

### Emergency Laws

In addition we are concerned that the failure of the Review to engage with the issue of emergency laws has left government in sole control of the pace of change in relation

to that vital area. As the Review itself recognised their **“efforts to develop proposals for a fair, rights-based, and effective criminal justice system which inspired the confidence of the community as a whole could not be divorced from the outcome of those separate reviews”** [into policing and emergency laws].

In the event that emergency laws continue to operate, the future of the recommendations of the Review may be fatally flawed in terms of public confidence. While the Review felt that it was constrained by its terms of reference from engaging with the issue of emergency laws, this distinction will undoubtedly be lost on many of those on the receiving end of the use and abuse of such laws. We believe the chances of a new criminal justice system commanding the confidence of the public will be maximised if the use of emergency laws is consigned to the past.

In the introduction to our main submission to the Review we said that the issue for the Review was not “whether change is needed, but how much change is needed. In our view fundamental and thoroughgoing change is required to undo the damage to community confidence in the system of the administration of criminal justice in this jurisdiction.” We believe the Review, as reflected in the number and extent of its recommendations, agreed that significant change was required. While, as indicated above, we believe that the Review has made a significant beginning to the task of creating a new accountable criminal justice system, we are of the firm view that its recommendations are a floor not a ceiling for the required programme of change. We will be working to ensure that this is the case.

**Paul Mageean**

*CAJ's full response to the Report on the Criminal Justice Review is now available from the office. Price £3.00*

### Up to date with CAJ

There have been meetings of the Equality and Membership subgroups.

Maggie attended a meeting in London organised by Justice on the question of social and economic rights. Paul did some media work around the Diplock Review. Maggie attended the FIDH - NGO panel meeting which was held in Dublin.

CAJ's response to the Report on the Criminal Justice Review is now available from the office. Price £3.00  
Congratulations from everyone at CAJ to Paul and Barbara on the birth of their daughter Aoife.

**Liz Martin**

## *Promoting Human Rights Through Bills of Rights: Comparative Perspectives*

**This edited collection of comparative perspectives is extremely timely for Northern Ireland. Philip Alston, the editor, is aware that a Bill of Rights can be little more than a facade and mask the grim reality, but he also recognises its critical potential.**

The book surveys different approaches and explores the input of international human rights law to the operation of Bills of Rights. It studies national level protection, the role of international norms in the absence of a Bill of Rights, comparative experience with Bills of Rights, and the judiciary and Bills of Rights.

One outcome of the proliferation of Bills of Rights will be (it is not greatly developed at present) a genuinely comparative law of human rights. This brings problems with it. Comparative law is already plagued by the difficulties surrounding different legal cultures. A Bill of Rights may, for example, work in one state because of its distinct legal and political culture, and not because of anything that inheres in the rights as drafted. Merely transplanting the rights may not work and comparison can then become facile. The understandable temptation is of course to beg, borrow and steal as much as possible. But this work shows that there are difficulties with this approach. Alston is interested in convergence and his argument is that international human rights law should act to encourage this.

The early sections of the book are reminders that human rights can be protected in the absence of a Bill of Rights. Andrew Clapham is not afraid to raise difficult questions, 'who do we trust with the last word over how to balance conflicts of rights?' David Kinley's contribution is useful in his reminder of the importance of effective parliamentary scrutiny. Yash Ghai's sobering analysis of Kenyan experience is evidence for how ineffective a Bill of Rights can in practice be. He argues that the Kenyan Bill of Rights has had almost no impact. He notes a political culture of hostility to human rights and constitutionalism. Mary Eberts offers a feminist perspective on the Canadian Charter, and while she is positive about its impact she notes the risky nature of Charter litigation. She rightly, I think, finds worrying the fact that, in Charter politics the marginalised appear to get more real engagement through the legal than the political process. Depressing indeed. In a critical perspective on rights discourse in South Africa, Martin Chanock notes the remarkable rise in the use of rights discourse. He argues that it began to dawn on the powerful that rights would protect their interests also. His analysis of the evolution of the ANC's position is interesting, particularly the stress on rights and political struggle.

The issue of who decides is a problematic one for the human rights movement. If rights are created by people through political struggle should their meaning really be

decided in unrepresentative and unaccountable public institutions (usually the courts)? Who should have the last word on the precise meaning of the rights we have? The problem is even more serious when we consider that there is substantial disagreement among reasonable people about the meaning of rights. In this context *who* decides on the practical meaning of human rights, and on the balancing of conflicting rights, is crucially important. This issue is addressed in the final chapters of the book.

Robert Sharpe argues that in Canada some think that the judges of the Supreme Court have gone too far and that political power has shifted to the courts, others believe that the judges are too timid and deferential. Sharpe argues instead that the judges have been 'cautiously positive', and suggests that in Canada rights litigation has often provoked a dialogue about those who are forgotten in day-to-day politics. In these instances the judges clearly act in order to make political democracy work.

The conclusion, written by the editor and Mac Darrow, is helpful in drawing some themes together. There are four which stand out: there is no one recipe for a successful Bill of Rights; its adoption must follow an inclusive process; disagreement is not a barrier to entrenchment; the creation of national institutions for the protection of human rights addresses, to some extent, concerns about judicial activism.

This book will make interesting reading for those contemplating a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. What will surprise many are the unanswered questions and assumptions upon which much current popular thinking on Bills of Rights is based. The study shows that it is not just a matter of borrowing from elsewhere. We need to know why things work and why they fail if we are not to repeat the mistakes of others. In Northern Ireland there is clearly one problem that will require hard thinking and that should precede assessment of which substantive rights to include. How do we craft our Bill of Rights now that we have secured a constitutional settlement based on the fundamental nature of the right to participate? It would seem very odd, would it not, to now hand everything over to an unaccountable and unrepresentative group of judges? Serious reform of legal institutions must be high on the agenda of those who want an effective Bill of Rights (see pages 4/5). On this a Bill of Rights may have to be very prescriptive in the instructions it gives to the judiciary. An imaginative solution will no doubt be found by the drafters to ensure that people continue to have a say. This book should help.

**Colin Harvey**

*Promoting Human Rights Through Bills of Rights: Comparative Perspectives* Philip Alston (ed) (1999, Oxford University Press, Oxford). £50.00 (Hb)

*Another in the series on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland*

## ***A school teacher's perspective on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland***

**The Good Friday Agreement in placing rights at its centre heralded for many people outside the “rights community” a new direction. It offered a rights paradigm through which people could address old issues in a new way, using a new language. To date many people, like myself, have been unaware of rights issues or have felt that they were inaccessible ideas that couldn't relate to directly. As such, the drawing up of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland can benefit ordinary people like myself, not only in terms of having a Bill itself, but also in terms of the process by which it is derived.**

### **Benefits of a Bill of Rights**

As a teacher, I am reminded on an almost daily basis by my pupils of the importance they place on fairness, especially when giving them a long homework or test!! This sense of fairness does not desert us when we leave school.

I believe that a Bill of Rights should provide a set of guidelines that will be fair to everyone, regardless of gender, religion, political opinion, community background and ability. Such a set of guidelines should equip ordinary people with tools they can confidently use to assert their rights, and to recognise violations of their rights and the rights of others. People should feel secure speaking out because the Bill of Rights is behind them.

It is also important that the Bill of Rights is seen to permeate all areas of life. I would be disappointed if it only tackled political problems arising from the conflict here. Just as society adjusts to a new political climate, with politicians discussing more general issues, the Bill should reflect not only political rights but also other areas of life which have been neglected. It should provide a broad frame of reference for rights, including social and economic issues.

### **Benefits of the process of consultation**

Education around rights issues and an awareness of the Bill of Rights among ordinary people are essential if there is to be a sense of ownership of the final product. I have seen the benefits of human rights education in the curriculum within my own school. Children, once made aware of issues, quickly grasp their significance and apply them to their own lives. They become more confident as they

become more informed. If the Bill of Rights is going to be successfully embraced by everyone in the community, they must be educated as well as consulted. Ordinary people need to be encouraged to actively participate in its development.

### **What should be in the Bill?**

I believe that the Bill should make specific provision for the following:

- *Right to human rights education.* Children will benefit enormously and grow up to be confident adults if they learn about these issues from an early age.
- *Right to participation.* Children will learn experientially in a climate that respects their rights. Schools that do this involve pupils in decision making through student councils etc, consulting them on school policies that affect them
- *Right to a good education.* So many of the children I teach enter the school demoralised after the selection process. This attack on their confidence hinders their educational and social development. The Bill should directly deal with this issue to help protect our children from being damaged in this way

In addition, adults within the education sector need protection.

- In the present climate many teachers can feel vulnerable when dealing with disruptive children. The Human Rights Commission should consider how best to protect teachers whilst also ensuring that children are fully protected.
- Fair employment legislation has been shown to protect the rights of many. The Commission should carefully consider how the exemption from this legislation for teachers affects the rights climate within our schools

I believe that the Bill of Rights gives ordinary people a unique opportunity to contribute to the shaping of their future. I hope that both the process of its development, and the final product, will inform, equip and empower every member of our society.

***Karen Donnelly***

## Civil Liberties Diary

**July 17** Secretary of State Peter Mandelson MP met Minister for Foreign Affairs Brian Cowan TD to discuss progress on the Police Bill.

**July 18** The House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee announced plans to undertake an inquiry into the North's legal aid system.

**July 19** The Crown Prosecution Service ruled that there was not enough evidence to justify trying Róisín McAliskey for the 1996 attack on a British Army barracks at Osnabruck in Germany.

**July 20** The Police Bill went before the House of Lords. Secretary of State Peter Mandelson stated that he would study constructively any reasonable amendments proposed.

In response to a question from Labour backbencher Jeremy Corbyn, Secretary of State Peter Mandelson indicated that an inquiry into the murder of Robert Hamill was still "possible".

Minister Nigel Dodds said that up to 600 people in Northern Ireland die each year from cold-related illnesses with a total of 170,000 households deemed to be suffering fuel-poverty.

**July 24** The Secretary of State announced that there would be no imminent return to trial by jury, citing paramilitary activity as the reason for the maintenance of the Diplock system.

It was reported that the Maze prison would shut within months, following the release of most the inmates and the transfer of the remainder.

**July 25** Peter Mandelson, Secretary of State, said that the new name of the RUC "for all operational purposes" would be the "Police Service of Northern Ireland".

Commenting on the early retirement packages for RUC officers being discussed in light of the Patten report, the Secretary of State said the amounts in question were the most generous ever offered to public sector workers. The expected cost was said to be in excess of £200 million.

**July 27** It was announced by the Secretary of State that families of "the disappeared" would be able to claim compensation of up to £10,000.

**July 28** Seventy-eight prisoners convicted of terrorist-related crimes were released from the Maze prison under the early-release provisions of the Good Friday Agreement. Fifteen prisoners remain to be released or transferred prior to the closure of the jail.

The Human Rights Commission briefed members of the House of Lords on their concerns about the conflicts and gaps between the Patten report and the Police Bill introduced by the government.

**July 29** A conference on the theme of 'Celebrating Sexual Diversity' at the Waterfront Hall heard speakers including Peter Tatchell examine attitudes to sexuality.

**July 31** Prime Minister Tony Blair met Taoiseach Bertie Ahern in London for talks centring on the Police Bill.

**Aug 1** The Northern Ireland Drinks Industry Group was reported to be holding discussions with education officials about the possibility of an ID card for young people to tackle under-age drinking.

**Aug 3** The Equality Commission settled 16 cases for a total of over £250 000, during the first six months of its existence.

**Aug 5** It was reported that Corporal Lee Clegg was to be awarded more than £25,000 in back-pay for the time spent in custody. The ex-paratrooper was convicted of offences including the murder of teenage joyriders in Northern Ireland but had his conviction quashed.

**Aug 14** Commander Hugh Orde who is leading day-to-day operation of the Stevens inquiry, said the team had taken a major step forward with the seizure of army intelligence files.

**Aug 18** It was reported that a £40,000 protection package is being offered to an ex-paratrooper giving evidence to the Bloody Sunday Inquiry.

*Compiled by volunteers from various newspaper sources.*

### Just News

Just News welcomes readers' news, views and comments.

Just News is published by the Committee on the Administration of Justice Ltd. Correspondence should be addressed to the Editor, **Fiona Doherty, CAJ Ltd.**

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