

IT HAPPENS IN DERRY



*Some Notes on
Discrimination practised against
the Catholic citizen majority of the
City of Derry in the North of
Ireland*



EDDIE McATEER, M.P.

20th JANUARY, 1964.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

PROCLAIMED BY THE UNITED NATIONS

(December 10th, 1948)

Some forms of discrimination specially pin-pointed in the Secretary-General's Memorandum:

1. Speeches or writings encouraging discrimination.
2. Discrimination by official authority — inequality of personal security, denial of freedom of movement or residence, or of peaceful association.
3. Denial to a minority of its just share of publicly-built housing.
4. Restrictions on a minority's right to vote.
5. Division of electoral areas to nullify the voting strength of particular groups.
6. Denial of employment or promotion in the public service.

ALL OF THESE RIGHTS are violated in the City of Derry.

*

GENERAL

EVER since the English Plantation in the seventeenth century, the City of Derry (officially misnamed "Londonderry") has been a hot-bed of religious intolerance. It started by rigorous exclusion of and heavy disabilities on the native Catholic Irish. From that far-off time right up to the present there has been ceaseless struggle by the under-privileged Catholics to attain their natural rights and by the propertied Unionists to penalise and restrict the growing Catholic population.

This anti-Catholicism has been fanned by public utterances of Stormont Ministers and, lest it be thought to be a question of dead or dying grievances, hear the voice of one Senator J. E. N. Barnhill in January, 1964, addressing a local Unionist party meeting. He said that employers were often a little careless in their choosing of employees and that Unionists should employ only Unionists.

"I am not saying that we should sack good Nationalist employees, but if we are going to employ new men they should be Unionists," he said.

The most shameless methods are constantly used to preserve minority Unionist control over the ever-growing Catholic majority.

The following notes briefly describe some of these devices:

GERRYMANDERING

This is the notorious system of keeping communities confined into separate electoral areas so that voting may be regionally controlled. The ward boundaries were deliberately re-arranged on no less than four occasions — the most recent in 1936 — to preserve the control in Unionist hands in total disregard of the democratic concept. The bulk of the huge Catholic majority is penned within one ward ghetto with 8 seats whilst the other two wards give the Unionists 12 seats and complete control of the Corporation.

THE FRANCHISE

As recently as 1962 there was re-enacted the archaic property franchise for Local Government purposes. The effect of this in Derry (1963 figures) is to restrict the total parliamentary register of 29,949 to 22,302 for municipal purposes in the interests of the Unionist Party. The number of Catholic voters thus eliminated is 6,226 as against 1,421 others so that Unionist control has been further under-written by a ready-made packet of 4,805 sterilised votes. This, of course, is the real reason for the fancy franchise.

JOBS

As in representation so in employment under the system.

Catholics are rigorously excluded from all the higher ranks of municipal employment. Of the total (year 1962) of 69 officials required for the civic administration only 8 are Catholics, a pattern which is faithfully followed by all the satellite committees of the Corporation and by local units of Stormont government and semi-State bodies. This in a city where, as will be seen below, Catholics outnumber all others in the population by more than 2 to 1.

CORPORATION REPRESENTATION

	Population (1961 Census)	Parliamentary Voters—1963	Local Government Voters—1963	Representation on Corporation
Catholics ...	36,049	19,411	13,185	8 (67.4)
Others	17,695	10,538	9,117	12 (87.4)
TOTALS	53,744	29,949	22,302	20

In practical effect more than two-thirds of the population is completely disfranchised.

In no instance have the Catholic majority anything like their proper representation. For example, the Government appointed Hospital Management Committee has 5 Catholics out of a total membership of 26. Likewise in all the public services, including the Transport Authority, the same bias prevails from top to bottom.

HOUSING ALLOCATIONS

Houses are provided by the Corporation and by the Housing Trust (a government controlled agency) and both bodies have systematically maintained a denominational pattern in awarding tenancies so that the religious apartheid in the city has been maintained and even intensified. Almost every Unionist seeking a house (and even some who were not) have been provided for, but a pathetic and lengthening back-log of about 2,000 Catholic applicants is apparently going to be left aside for many years to come. Catholic applicants in dire and often desperate need are left to wait indefinitely (some have already waited 15 years) and to watch Unionists in no need whatever quickly move into new homes earmarked in their favour. The responsible Minister at Stormont steadfastly refuses to inquire into the allocations or do anything whatever about it, closing his ears to all protests and appeals on the subject.

*

Finally . . .

SUCH a curtain of secrecy hangs over these operations that it is often difficult to expose them in particular cases of the kind. But the end results are the same and they do not happen accidentally.

No legal or parliamentary means of redress lies open to Catholics since the British Government invariably refers all complaints to the guilty Party at Stormont. In 1951 a petition to the Privy Council in Britain was "commanded that it be referred to the Northern Ireland Authorities" (Home Office papers under reference 685,165/15).

The safeguarding Clause 5 in the Government of Ireland Act which created the Belfast Parliament is circumvented by subterfuge and by undercover practices and is no practical help to protection for Catholics.

Every hour of every day the Declaration of Human Rights is violated in the City of Derry.

Is it really so surprising that there should be occasional outbreaks of violence in an embittered and frustrated community which is relentlessly denied any democratic redress?