

STATE PAPERS

Highlighting ban on abortion in Northern Ireland

Éamon Phoenix
newsdesk@irishnews.com

THE ban on abortion in Northern Ireland was dramatically highlighted in 1992, this year's file releases reveal.

The issue emerged in April that year when a Northern Ireland woman had an abortion at a Scottish hospital and her local health board refused to refund the cost of the treatment.

As a result the Scottish Health Management Executive raised the issue with the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) at Stormont.

In a note on the file dat-

ed March 30, 1992 a Stormont official explained that with the introduction of contracting for Health and Social Services, Northern Ireland health boards needed to reimburse hospitals in Britain which had provided treatment for residents travelling from Northern Ireland.

In this particular case, he informed colleagues, concerned a local woman who had had an abortion in Scotland.

Later, when her local Eastern Health Board was asked to refund the cost of the treatment, it refused on two grounds: firstly, that prior authorisation had not been obtained and secondly,

that "the operation was illegal".

In the official's view, the allegation of illegality needed to be clarified as it had implications for Northern Ireland, given the "more restrictive legal position on abortion in Northern Ireland".

The official acknowledged that many Northern Ireland women travelled to Britain for abortions.

His concern was that, in light of the Eastern Board's stance, and the existence of separate legislation in Northern Ireland, women travelling from the north might be prevented in future from obtaining abortions in Britain on the NHS.

He added: "This will

raise the question of equality of access for services within the UK and the role of boards here in making judgments about a rather emotive issue."

The official noted that the local exemption from the provisions of the 1967 Abortion Act commanded broad support from politicians and the Churches across the north.

Therapeutic terminations could only be carried out in NI with the consent of two doctors and the informed consent of the woman.

However, he noted that 1,855 abortions were carried out in Britain on Northern Ireland women in 1991 alone.



■ VISITORS: Ray Burke TD, left, Gerry Collins TD, John Stanley MP and Tom King arriving at Stormont Castle

Report shows underfunding of Catholic schools in north

Éamon Phoenix

THE historic underfunding of Catholic schools in Northern Ireland, as revealed in a recent human rights report, was raised by the Republic's Foreign Affairs minister Gerry Collins with British ministers in 1991.

At a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference in London on October 17 1991, the minister referred to the recent report of the Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights (SACHR) on the sources of inequality in Northern

Ireland. He said that it "had revealed quite clearly a disturbing link between underfunding of the Catholic school system and the subsequent disadvantage to young Catholics seeking employment". While he acknowledged the steps taken in the field of fair employment, action was now required to overcome the remaining structural impediments to achieving full equality in Northern Ireland. The minister stressed that lasting political progress depended on full equality for both communities.

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