

CABINET PAPERS 1977

Belfast

Growing sectarian division of Derry cause for concern

THE growing sectarian division of Derry along the line of the River Foyle and the decline of traditional industries are highlighted in a previously confidential report on the city in 1977, released this week in Belfast under the 30-year rule.

The report, dealing with the city as an area of special need, noted that the last few years had seen the development of a serious trend towards segregation by religion.

"Apart from a small, ultra-Protestant loyalist community in the Fountain Street area of the old city and some middle-class residents in Culmore, the Cityside is now largely Catholic," the report read.

"The east bank, by contrast, is more strongly Protestant.

"The continuous sense of insecurity which the present situation fosters in the Protestant population on the west bank adds to the pressures on them to move to the east bank.

"This trend is recognised by and greatly disturbs many in the Catholic community who wish to maintain a unified Derry spirit."

According to the report the demand was already arising for the relocation of facilities on the east bank and for dual provision in the two parts of Derry.

On employment the report stressed: "Lack of sufficient employment opportunities, particularly for males, is and always has been Londonderry's major social need."

The unemployment rate for the 'Derry Travel To Work Area' was 16.2 per cent compared with a rate of 10.4 per cent for Northern Ireland.

This represented 20.1 per cent for males (compared with 12.2 per cent for Northern Ireland) and 10.2 per cent for females.

The highest unemployment rates occurred in the Creggan and Bogside estates.

In conclusion the report stressed that "the disturbing trend towards the division of the city on the line of the river should be where possible countered".

THE Protestant Churches in Derry were gravely concerned in 1977 at the insidious division of the city into "separate towns" owing to the continuous drift of Protestants from the west bank of the Foyle.

The issue was raised by Canon Brian Hannon, a Church of Ireland rector and chairman of the City Ministers' Council in Derry, in a letter to Lord Melchett, the Stormont



■ **POLARISATION:** A report on Derry noted that over the last few years a serious trend towards segregation by religion had developed

education minister, concerning the government's planned educational reorganisation.

Writing from Christchurch rectory in Derry on March 30 1977, Canon Hannon (later Bishop of Clogher) stressed that the Protestant churchmen were less concerned with specific educational proposals than with the demographic implications for the area's Protestant population.

A group of 'Derry peace women' from the Bogside and Creggan districts spoke in the most glowing terms about the RUC assistant chief constable Frank Lagan, saying that 'even the IRA have a certain respect for him'

He told the minister: "We believe that all responsible opinion would deeply regret the city of Londonderry becoming two separate towns: (a) Derry on the west bank on

the river, 98 per cent Roman Catholic (at present 95 per cent); and (b) Londonderry on the east bank, 60 per cent Protestant."

Canon Hannon stated that the city's Protestant population was housed approximately 75 per cent Waterside and 25 per cent Cityside.

"We believe that it is in the best interest of the city as a whole that the 25 per cent are encouraged to stay," he wrote.

His fear was that proposals on reorganisation of schools "might make such a separation (of the city) imminent and inevitable".

A BITTER clash between the SDLP-controlled Derry City Council and the Labour secretary of state, Roy Mason, in 1977 is revealed in confidential files released this week from the direct-rule administration at Stormont.

On August 1 1977 the city's town clerk, Colm Geary, wrote to Mr Mason on behalf of the council, protesting at "a deliberate policy by officials as yet unknown to downgrade the city once and for all".

He highlighted, in particular, the tendency of central government to transfer headquarters offices and agencies out of the north's second city. In particular, there was a

pattern of establishing a headquarters outside Derry to serve the city in such areas as education, roads and public health.

As a result of "the serious concern which is being felt", Mr Geary wrote, Derry City Council were seeking a meeting with the secretary of state as a matter of urgency.

The council's protests evoked a reply from Mr Mason's private secretary, Joan Young, on August 23 1977.

Referring to the "council's concern at what is alleged to be a deliberate policy to downgrade the city", she wrote: "I can assure you there has been no such policy."

In recent times there had been no public sector offices withdrawn from Derry and the level of public-sector employment had remained stable.

She said that in light of the secretary of state's assurance that there was no substance in the council's fear of a deliberate downgrading of the city, Mr Mason did not consider that a meeting with the council would be useful.

THE urgent need for policing in the city's Bogside and Creggan districts was raised by a group of "Derry peace women" at a meeting with NIO minister Lord Donaldson in 1974,

according to secret minutes, now released in Belfast for the first time.

At the meeting in Stormont Castle on August 23 1974 the women, whose names have been blanked out in the file, said it was a unanimous view that a police service was urgently needed in their districts.

"While wrongs had been committed in 1969, they felt that force which would put an end to the prevailing anarchy would be welcomed," the papers read.

"If anything, things had got worse since they formed their alliance over two years ago."

The women spoke "in the most glowing terms" about RUC assistant chief constable Frank Lagan, who featured prominently in the recent Bloody Sunday Inquiry.

According to the minutes, "they said that if he were not there, the situation (in Derry) would be much worse; even the IRA have a certain respect for him".

Lord Donaldson asked the women about the Bogside Community Association and was told that it was "under the control of extremists and Sinn Féiners".

The minister commended the ladies for their courage and said he appreciated the difficulties which they and moderates faced.

British at pains to appear impartial

EVIDENCE that the British government was at pains to convince the US it was impartial in dealing with loyalist and republican paramilitaries is highlighted in this year's release of cabinet papers. At a meeting between the then secretary of state, Roy Mason, and the British ambassador to Washington, Peter Jay, in July 1977 Mr Mason offered to send Mr Jay material he might use "to demonstrate that the government and security forces in Northern Ireland were as resolute in dealing with violence from loyalist paramilitary organisations as with that from the IRA". In a letter to Mr Jay on August 2 1977 Mr Mason said it was not normal practice for the British government to release figures on "the sectarian attribution of violence".

"To do so might encourage further division between the two communities in Northern Ireland and, worse still, stimulate extremists on one side to 'right' any supposed imbalance," he said.

But Mr Mason said the accusation that British policy was one-sided must be rebutted with statistics. "Violence in Northern Ireland is perpetrated by both loyalist and republican terrorist groups," he said.

Mr Mason said responsibility for violent incidents during the first half of 1977 was reflected in the figures which showed that loyalists had carried out 21 murders and republicans 51. Republicans were responsible for 249 bombings. Loyalists perpetrated 59.

Mr Mason impressed on Mr Jay: "The majority of violent incidents continue to be the responsibility of the Provisional IRA and the balance of attention of the security forces is, therefore, directed towards the detection, arrest and charging of members of that organisation."