

STATE PAPERS

Fears west Belfast cash seen as 'reward for killing soldiers'

Éamon Phoenix

THE head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service spoke of west Belfast having a "ghetto mentality" and being alienated from "normal civilised behaviour".

Sir Ken Bloomfield made his observations in a key memo to secretary of state Tom King amid efforts to tackle poverty, unemployment and paramilitarism in Catholic west Belfast.

But Bloomfield feared that government attempts to regenerate the area would provoke a "crude political reaction [from unionism] on the lines of, 'Do you have to kill British soldiers... to benefit from a cornucopia of assistance?'"

The discussions are revealed in declassified files from the late 1980s.

A report on west Belfast noted that it contained 10 per cent of the Northern Ireland population while 73 per cent of the population was Roman Catholic.

While 35 per cent of the economically-active population in the area was Catholic, "Protestants are less likely to be unemployed than Catholics".

Catholic male unemployment in west Belfast was 47 per cent – double that of Northern Ireland as a whole.

In an April 1987 memo for King, Bloomfield noted that other areas showed many of the acute social and economic problems of Catholic west Belfast.

But he added: "What makes the area unique is the scale and concentration of these problems and their very close association with grave political and security difficulties; the strength of PIRA/Sinn Féin and their influence in the area; the alienation of a large section of the population from the institutions of government (and indeed, in some respects, from normal civilised behaviour); the ghetto mentality and the widespread sense of hopelessness and lack of faith in the government's interest in the problem."

He wrote that even the most moderate people in west Belfast "tend to

“It would be better if government efforts were ‘not too vigorously trumpeted’

– Sir Ken Bloomfield

■ **DEVELOPMENT PLAN:** Tom King speaking to journalists and walking with bodyguards at Windsor House in March 1986



Problem of SF illegal 'advice centres'

Éamon Phoenix

THE British government had concerns in the mid-1980s about Sinn Féin using Housing Executive properties to house its advice centres, papers released today reveal.

At a time when London was pursuing a general policy of marginalising republicans, a March 1984 memo to NIO minister of state Adam Butler to officials voices concern that a "blind eye" is being turned to squatting, which effectively created "no-go areas".

Pat Carvill of Stormont's Central Secretariat responds by saying that four Housing Executive properties in Belfast were illegally occupied by Sinn Féin but that a policy was in place of not seeking payment from the party. It was felt that forcing the housing



■ **ACTIVITIES:** Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams and Danny Morrison in 1988

officials to collect rent "would produce major difficulties". There was consideration given to "boosting alternatives to Sinn Féin" through the provision of community support but Mr Carvill concluded that it would not impact on the party's activities due to an "almost limitless

scope for welfare rights work and the skill and efficiency with which Sinn Féin activities are conducted".

The correspondence notes a general shift in republicans' attitude to officialdom after the May 1985 local government elections, when it took 12 per cent of the vote and had seven councillors elected in Belfast. In a letter to DH Hill of the NIO Law and Order Division, Jack Dunlop, the principal civil representative based at British Military HQ in Lisburn noted a "change in approach by Sinn Féin representatives of late". The NIO was also aware of the illegal occupation of premises by loyalist paramilitaries. A memo from June 1986 reports on premises in Craven Street in Belfast where the security forces had recently found weapons.

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