

minimalist state has become more apparent in the late 80s the conservative view of the welfare state has lost ground.

### Social Policy in Northern Ireland

I have already indicated that current trends in Social Policy in Britain have been reflected in Northern Ireland and I now want to look at this in more detail. Social Policy in Northern Ireland throughout its history has been dominated by the themes of parity and devolution. In a sense prior to 1972 the Northern Ireland Government either followed parity with Britain or used its devolved powers to do things differently. A mixture of pressures and choices, as explained by John Ditch in his book 'Social Policy in Northern Ireland between 1939 and 1950' led to a strong commitment to parity in the Social Security system and to the maintenance of the same scale and standard of health care. On the other hand there were significant difference in education, housing and personal social services.

Parity in its simplest form has meant the same or virtually the same legislation and provision for Northern Ireland as Great Britain. Under Direct Rule, particularly in the 1980s, there has been a large increase in this form of parity, increasingly all Northern Ireland Legislation is being brought into line with Britain in most aspects of social policy and social legislation. The introductory phrases in the House of Commons by Ministers have become common-place to

quote them, 'the provision contained in the proposed Order are parity measures', 'the legislation brings Northern Ireland into line with provisions in Great Britain', 'the provisions are broadly comparable to those in England and Scotland'. This reminds me that I was once speaking about parity when up stood the Professor of Politics at Glasgow University - and of course he was pointing out that Northern Ireland legislation should be compared with Scotland as well as England, as there are differences.

This trend to parity has seen remaining Social Security differences removed in 1986 legislation and the announcement this year of the repeal of the 1971 Payments for Debt Act. Housing still has a unique administrative structure but the last ten years have seen a convergence of policy with Britain in key areas of sales of public sector housing, rents, housing benefit, estate-based strategies, promotion of owner-occupation. Health has moved towards British legislation, currently with the range of measures of the Working for Patients strategy - Budgets for large GP practices, self-governing hospitals, contracts and also in personal social services with the community care strategy although the administrative structure remains different. Education has moved in some ways closer with the Education reform legislation but major differences in secondary education remain. Parity has also dominated other areas of social legislation, divorce, sex discrimination, employment, wage



councils, and consumer legislation.

What are the reasons for this push towards parity? I identify six main factors.

Table 4

Factors Encouraging Parity

1. Direct Rule Ministers
  2. New Legislation
  3. Role of Civil Service
  4. Increasing use of UK Legislation
  5. EC Influence
  6. Demand from Interest Groups
- 
1. Direct Rule Ministers - NIO ministers require convincing that social policies should be different from their own constituency.
  2. New Legislation - In the last ten years there has been a great deal of new legislation or changes and this raises issue of application to Northern Ireland and the opportunities for 'harmonisation' a word that is increasingly used.
  3. The NICS has no local political forum to direct it and with continuing Direct Rule has now less experience of developing policies different from those in Britain.
  4. The increasing trend towards GB legislation applying to Northern Ireland, rather than having a separate Order-in-Council, or often part of Great Britain legislation

applying. Half of normal British legislation now applies at least, in part, a trend almost unnoticed. Examples are consumer protection, Building Societies Act, Drug Trafficking, Family Court Act.

5. EC Influence - Several examples, Equal pay, Equal Pensions Rights recently.
6. This is more speculative - often demands for parity from interest groups and groups like CBI.

#### Other Measures of Parity

There are other dimensions of parity, apart from legislation. It is possible to analyse parity in public expenditure. This is a more important consideration as the current operation of the Northern Ireland expenditure Block gives the Secretary of State a degree of discretion in adjusting allocations between the major services. It is possible to examine expenditure per capita in Northern Ireland compared to England, Scotland and Wales.

Table 5

	Per. Capita Expenditure 1986-1987				% of U.K. Expenditure	% Shift in N. Ireland Expenditure 83-88
	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland		
Agriculture	14	45	40	109	14	-2
Industry	81	178	174	210	7	-8
Transport	100	117	124	78	2	-1
Housing	54	126	56	153	7	-6
Other Environment	82	116	116	126	4	+2
Law and Order	98	112	83	332	9	+4
Education	322	439	330	447	4	+2
Health-Personal S.S.	380	479	401	485	3	+1
Security	789	833	853	895	3	+2
Other Public Service	31	56	43	44	3	+8



The Table shows data in first 4 columns when last published in Public Expenditure Survey of 1986-7. There are a few interesting points from Table 5.

- a) Highest differential is in agriculture. Northern Ireland agriculture counts for 8% of the UK output.
- b) In Housing expenditure per capita has been much higher mainly because of higher rate of unfitness but is now coming more into line with Great Britain. The final column gives movements within the Northern Ireland expenditure block in recent years.
- c) Other social services expenditure, health, social security expenditure per capita is not very different.

Column 5 provides another way out comparing expenditure. It is % of total UK full expenditure and the key is that Northern Ireland's population is about 2.5%, so all are higher.

In the 1980s it has been revealed that public expenditure per capita in Northern Ireland was 35-40% higher than in the United Kingdom. An analysis by the Northern Ireland Economic Council has argued that when account is taken of various factors, the cost of different administrative arrangements, the impact of national policies on a different population structure, special needs and law and order the overall differential is less than 2%. Although possibly it could be argued against the NIEC view that Scotland and Wales also

have special factors even England may have. However, in a reworking of the relevant data in 1989 Professor Bradshaw of York University argues that taking into account the special features of Northern Ireland the net excess had fallen to nil. He suggests Northern Ireland is receiving no more money per capita than it needs to maintain parity.

Parity of Outcome

There is one other way of analysing parity, parity of output and outcome. Output can be measured in the actual standard of services, and differences in output reflect mainly administrative differences if policies are similar. Outcome is the actual results of legislation, provision and expenditure. Outcome opens up a large area, raises questions of comparative indicators and so on.

As an example we can use such indicators as Housing Unfitness

Table 6

% Unfit Dwellings

Northern Ireland		England & Wales	
1974	19.6	1971	7.3
1979	14.1	1976	4.6
1984	10.4	1981	6.2
1987	8.4	1986	5.6

and see a clear trend towards parity of outcome. In some areas the level of provision still seems to lag behind, for example day nursery places, in others better, for example



hospitals. Parity of outcome is a complex area and can be mediated by other factors, for example take up rates, the cost of living, or by demographic features, for example freezing child benefits hits Northern Ireland harder because of the higher proportion of children. There are other areas where research is lacking in Northern Ireland e.g. in personal social services which means comparisons have not yet been made.

#### Political Implications

Given this trend towards parity I want to look at two major consequences for political developments and the implications for the conflict in Northern Ireland.

#### Table 7

##### Political Implications

1. Integration by statutory
2. Makes devolution difficult
3. marginalises Anglo-Irish Agreement

I would refer to three implications:

1. Parity is so extensive that it amounts to integration by statute. It has in practice integrated Northern Ireland more into the United Kingdom.
2. Contributes to making Devolution more difficult. It would be very difficult for a devolved parliament to start to dismantle all the parity provisions and of course doing things differently is one of the rationales



for devolution.

3. Marginalists the Anglo-Irish Agreement - Anglo-Irish Agreement has had no effect on the growth of parity and is confined largely to security policy and aspects of community relationships.

#### Continuing Differences

It is worth noting that some aspects of social policy have remained distinctive and there are specific reasons for this.

Table 8

#### Reasons for Differences

1. Special Needs, e.g. housing unfitness
  2. Strong Local Opinions, e.g. law on abortion
  3. Powerful Interests, e.g. maintenance of grammar schools
  4. Bureaucratic wishes
  5. As a Response to the Conflict
4. The role of the bureaucracy is important in the absence of a local political forum. Perhaps a recent issue in parity debate illustrates this. The Government has recently announced new structure of administration of Health and Social Service Boards, replacing existing Boards with new small management Boards removing councillors and other representatives.
- With reference to Health this is largely following parity, for personal social services it is moving further away from parity, largely out of administrative

convenience. In Great Britain personal social services are a local Government responsibility. In Northern Ireland the move away from existing Board structure is 1) a breach of parity, 2) a rejection of the argument from Macrory, that is Nominated Boards were only justified given the existence of a regional government, and 3) runs contrary to the view even expressed by Ministers, that people should have more say in the administration of services and a start should be made in less politically contentious areas and such a structure seems to provide inadequate consumer representation.

5. As a response to the conflict - a clear example is Fair Employment legislation which Bob Osborne has described in one of his many works in the area as notably in advance of those in Great Britain and represents a major state intervention in the labour market.

#### Parity and Conflict

This leads to my final comment, the significance of parity for conflict in Northern Ireland. Such significance presupposes that Social Policy can play a role in the amelioration of conflict. Some commentators have suggested developed welfare states contribute to the maintenance of stability, consensus and social integration, by reducing inequalities and divisions and by bestowing the status of citizenship on all members of society, a concept undergoing renewed interest in Social Policy writing at present. It is



a matter for discussion whether comprehensive welfare services in Northern Ireland have prevented conflict and social breakdown becoming worse or have had little effect given the nature of the violence, divided loyalties and lack of political agreement. A strict application of parity in recent years might not have helped remove social deprivation. Recent research by Eileen Evason and Roberta Woods shows how Northern Ireland has been especially disadvantaged by the Social Fund. However, a recent book by two other members of the Department, Frank Gaffikin and Mike Morrissey 'Northern Ireland the Thatcher Years' has indicated that in general Government policy in Northern Ireland has proved more flexible and pragmatic in its social agenda than in GB. This would seem a recognition that welfare programmes do have a role to play in dissipating support for violence.

My conclusion, while I hope I have been able to make some definitive statements about trends in parity and their consequences but some of the comments remain speculative and require further questioning.

University  
of Ulster  
at Coleraine

Sorry for delay in photo-copying  
I enclose relevant section of text

with Compliments

David Binnett