

EDITORIAL

Belfast is often thought of as the Beirut of Western Europe by those who have not visited the city. A popular image is of a city-centre of smouldering rubble, a breakdown in law and order, with gangs of gunmen roaming the streets. Little could be further from the truth as Belfast boasts a busy commercial centre in which most shoppers go about their daily tasks oblivious to the terrorist threat.

In fact, officially recorded crime figures show that Northern Ireland had the lowest rate of crime per 100,000 of the population compared with all 43 police constabularies in England and Wales in 1991. This is borne out by a number of other studies such as the recent International Victimisation Study (Van Dijk, et al 1990). Even for violence against the person, Northern Ireland had a lower rate than 36 of the above constabularies. However, when it comes to murder, attempted murder and other crimes related to terrorism then Northern Ireland records a much higher rate than the rest of the United Kingdom and most of western Europe. Nonetheless, even the high rate of 6 intentional homicides per 100,000 population pales when compared with some of the United States cities where Detroit recorded 63 Homicides, Atlanta 48, and Washington 36.

This edition of Criminal Justice Matters on Northern Ireland has been put together by members (and friends) of the Northern Ireland branch of the British Society of Criminology. It contains a number of articles which highlight some of the unusual aspects of crime in Northern Ireland.

Mary Clark-Glass sets the context by referring to some of the paradoxes to be found in Northern Ireland society. **John Jackson** examines the neglect of the recent Royal Commission on Criminal Justice (1993) to look at some of the lessons to be learned from Northern Ireland - it is arguable that the Commission actually had its genesis from the terrorist situation emanating from Northern Ireland.

Dermot Walsh examines the emergence of a second criminal justice system in Northern Ireland and how a legal

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system closely modelled on that prevailing in England and Wales has been overlaid by emergency legislation. Following a somewhat similar approach **Brian Gormally** and **Kieran McEvoy** look at how the prison system has adapted over the years to manage politically motivated offenders. On a slightly lighter note **John Morison** and **Ray Geary** analyse how crime in Northern Ireland has been portrayed by the media and literature.

Pat Conway brings us face to face with reality by describing the so-called 'alternative justice system' (although one shudders at using the word justice in describing its operation) with the threats and punishments handed out by terrorist

groups to young people. He also gives an account of the work of Base 2 which seeks to support young people under threat.

Joan McQuoid provides information on the results of a pilot study on self-reported delinquency amongst young people in Belfast. The results of a large scale self-report study are drawn upon by **Bill Lockhart** to estimate the prevalence of car theft offenders and how important such estimates are in developing appropriate crime prevention policy.

Our thanks are due to the various persons who took time to contribute to this edition.

Bill Lockhart & Julia Braggins

*Each issue of CJM focuses on a special area of criminological interest. CJM 14 will consider **Custody**. Contributions are welcome and will be required by 30th November 1993. To advertise, please contact the ISTD office (see page 11).*

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