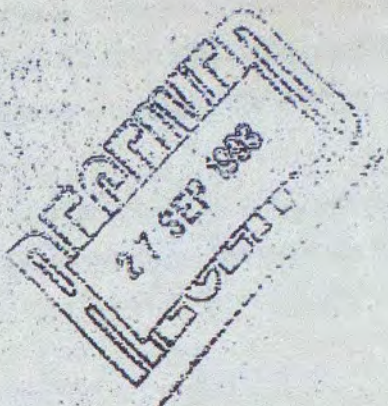


Dr. Maurna Crozier
Cultural Traditions Group
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BELFAST

Dear Maurna,

Just a few stray thoughts on the value of Cultural Traditions as opposed to the unfavourable image of the Community Relation Council which I trust may be of interest to you.

In the Sunday Times of 7 March 1993 Professor Roger Scruton was cited by Andro Linklater in a review of Scruton's Xanthippic Dialogues as describing Chatham House and the Institute of Strategic Studies as "people with a vested interest in falsehood" and the Commission for Racial Equality as a "laboratory of mendacity" and a "campaign of lies and subversion."

The Unionist community harbours similar but perhaps slightly more restrained reservations about a variety of organisations which operate in Northern Ireland. Two in particular spring to mind, namely the Fair Employment Commission, which is widely regarded as a racket to secure employment for Roman Catholics at the expense of the Protestant community, and the Community Relation Council.

My understanding of the CRC is that its perfectly laudable aim is to promote better community relations in Northern Ireland by helping to remove the prejudice, hatred and distrust between the two sides of the community but I do not believe this is really the perception of the Unionist community. Beneath the liberal veneer concealing the utopianism of the CRC they discern something radically different and threatening to their community and identity.

The CRC's profession that it holds no position on a political or constitutional solution for Northern Ireland simply invites scepticism. Talk of so-called 'pre-political work' is, rightly or wrongly, equated with softening up the Unionist community preliminary to a united Ireland. Promoting the concept of the 'guilty Prods' is neither a welcome nor useful approach. Why should Unionists or Protestants be regarded as any more responsible for the present troubles than their Nationalist or Roman Catholic neighbours? Support for ecumenism is viewed by a large proportion of the Protestant population as an attempt to undermine the benefits of the Reformation. Ecumenism is feared as a device to secure the absorption of Protestantism into the Church of Rome. Perusal of the CRC's

magazine is not reassuring either as anti-Protestant bias is discernable.

It may be safely predicted that the CRC's forthcoming publication on Flags, Emblems & Anthems will essentially amount to a capitulation to the Irish nationalist position. All these perceptions may be wrong and mistaken but they exist and to that extent the CRC is hopelessly compromised.

The Cultural Traditions Programme does not engender the same degree of hostility, although it would be foolish to pretend that it entirely escapes the stigma of the CRC. Cultural Traditions may be viewed by the Unionist community either positively or negatively. The negative viewpoint is informed by the belief that Cultural Traditions is a vehicle to promote and fund the Irish language with a few crumbs tossed in the direction of the Unionist community to secure their acquiescence.

The positive view of Cultural Traditions is based upon taking the Group's stated aims and objectives at face value, e.g. 'This book (Passion and Prejudice edited by Paul Bew, Kenneth Darwin and Gordon Gillespie) has received support from the Cultural Traditions Programme of the Community Relations Council, which aims to encourage acceptance and understanding of cultural diversity.' The following, contained in the Cultural Traditions publicity leaflet, is also a very acceptable definition of what Cultural Traditions should be about:

The programme's aim has been to broaden the appreciation of cultural diversity in Northern Ireland as a means of fostering increased tolerance and mutual understanding between Protestant/unionist and Catholic/nationalist communities.

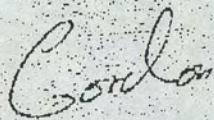
Possibly this requires a suspension of disbelief but it is a view of Cultural Traditions which I am prepared to buy and sell to others. Persuading the Unionist community that Cultural Traditions does not have a hidden agenda is of crucial importance. To this end I have tried to encourage application to the Cultural Traditions programme from the Unionist community. Applications from this source have increased, but for this I would claim neither responsibility nor credit. However it is most unfortunate as this desirable trend is developing that the Cultural Traditions budget should be so savagely cut. Irrespective of whether or not there is a connection between these two facts, may well conclude that this is one more example of the asymmetrical treatment meted out to the two communities: a willingness to pander to every Nationalist whim at the behest of Dublin and treating Unionists with total indifference and disdain.

The Cultural Traditions programme has many merits. The idea that our rich diversity of cultural traditions should be regarded not as a source of division and conflict but rather as a heritage which like a menu from which an individual is at liberty to pick and choose without restricting the choices of others (to employ the analogy which I employed at launch of the Tullycarnet Yarnspinner's leaflet.) seems eminently sensible. So too is the aim of developing greater cultural confidence within the communities. Whereas much of what the Community Relations Council engages in is

short-term and Utopian, Cultural Traditions is involved in projects which are practical and long-term. Short-term fixes result in mirages but the long haul to the oasis is the strategy which will produce a satisfactory outcome. What is practical is of infinitely greater value than the Utopian. But above all to diminish the Cultural Traditions programme is to discriminate against the Unionist community in two ways. First of all, it is to devalue something worthwhile to which Unionists are increasingly willing to relate but require some time. Secondly, the Unionist community, in my estimation, has greater need of building up its cultural confidence.

There apparently used to be a slogan painted on the gable walls of West Belfast to the effect "God made the Catholics (sic) but the Armalite made them equal." It would be desirable that Unionist confidence building did not follow this particular route.

Yours sincerely



Gordon R E Lucy