THE REGULATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE’S SEXUALITY AND CITIZENSHIP IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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Introduction:
This paper is concerned with the intense controversy over young people’s access to sexual and reproductive health services in Northern Ireland over the last decade or more. The intensity of this controversy led to the forced closure of the Ulster Pregnancy Advisory Association after its offices were firebombed in July 1999 (see Gillan 1999). I will consider what place this controversy has in the sectarian political culture of Northern Ireland, and what significance the issue might have, particularly for those who are actively engaged in opposing young people’s access to such services.

Political Background:
The specific controversy I’m concerned with here took shape in June 1991, when Northern Ireland’s Eastern Health and Social Services Board invited the Brook Advisory Service, which offers impartial and confidential sexual and reproductive health advice to young people, to establish a branch in Belfast. The rate of pregnancy among young women aged between 15 and 19 had been much higher in the Eastern Health Board’s region than in the rest of the province, and was also much higher than the rate in England and Wales, throughout the 1980s. The Health Board’s invitation to Brook came in response to a UK Government requirement that the rate of teenage pregnancy in the region be reduced by 15% (Scally 1992:2.08).

The Brook Service’s acceptance of the invitation sparked a public controversy about the role of the state in providing sex education to young people, a controversy which has not been resolved. Despite some strident opposition, however, a branch of the clinic was opened in Belfast in June 1992. Opponents continue to campaign against the clinic, and efforts to open a branch of Brook in Derry, the region’s other major city, have so far not succeeded.¹

What is of interest in this ongoing controversy are the ways in which groups and political parties who might otherwise divide along Catholic/Protestant or nationalist/unionist lines, as they define their boundaries in opposition to each other and in relation to Britain and Ireland, appeared to form a united, non-sectarian front in opposition to Brook, as well as in opposition to any proposal to extend access to abortion in the region. State regulation of sexual morality and reproduction seems to be one of the few areas where cross-national agreement occurs in the North of Ireland.
Abortion Politics and Law
Opposition to the opening of Brook in Belfast can only be understood in the broader context of the history of reproductive politics in the region. Access to abortion more specifically provides the political and legal background against which opposition to Brook is shaped.2 Opponents of Brook often argue that the organisation’s presence in a region leads to an increase in abortion rates.3 Many of Brook’s opponents are also opponents of abortion access for women, and see the opening of the Brook Centre in Northern Ireland as a significant event in regulating access to abortion in the region. In response to this controversy, Brook agreed that their Belfast branch would not directly refer young women to abortion providers, as its other branches do, but would instead refer them to pregnancy counselling or family planning agencies. Their work in Belfast was primary to provide non-directive and confidential information and advice on sexual and reproductive health. Nevertheless, their Belfast office continues to be regularly picketed by anti-abortion protesters, who appear to be convinced that Brook promotes abortion among young people in the region.

Northern Ireland’s law on abortion is distinct from the rest of the United Kingdom, where legislation was enacted in 1967 to allow pregnancies to be terminated in a number of specific circumstances, with the agreement of two medical doctors. The British Abortion Act has never been extended to Northern Ireland, largely because of the opposition of Northern Ireland’s mostly Unionist Members of Parliament. Access to abortion law in Northern Ireland is largely regulated under a piece of nineteenth century legislation, the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, as interpreted by subsequent judicial decisions.4 It seems that, under Northern Ireland law, abortion can legally be carried out when there is a ‘real and serious’ threat of permanent or long-term damage to a woman’s life, including to her physical and mental health. However, as Lee (1995b) points out, the lack of clarity about the law in this area has resulted in doctors being reluctant to carry out abortions even where the risk of self-destruction is beyond doubt, and where the abortion has been authorised by the courts.5 In one case in 1993, a pregnant and suicidal 14 year old ward of court, known as ‘K’, had to be taken to Liverpool for a termination that the courts had decided could be lawfully carried out in Northern Ireland, because no doctor would agree to the operation, apparently due to fear of further litigation (Lee 1995b: 30-31).

In summary, while abortions can be carried out in Britain in circumstances where a pregnancy poses a risk of injury to the physical or mental health of a pregnant woman, or any of her existing children, as well as for reasons of physical or mental abnormalities and risk to life, the law in Northern Ireland is much more restrictive, and has been the subject of a judicial review, currently under appeal.6 One important effect of this is that very few abortions are carried out in Northern Ireland, and most women from the region seeking abortion have little option but to undertake the expense and stress of travelling to Britain to do so. Furthermore, although abortion is legal in Northern Ireland,7 many anti-abortion campaigners claim that they are motivated by a desire to keep abortion out of Northern Ireland. There would seem to be little awareness, either amongst the public in general or among medical practitioners themselves, of the circumstances within which a legal abortion can take place.

Issues raised:
These range of political and legal struggles over access to sex education and reproductive health services raise two important issues. Firstly, they indicate the importance of sexuality and reproductive rights and health in the political project of a range of actors in the region. I will
consider this in more detail below. Secondly, it points to the ways in which the politicisation of sexuality and reproduction can produce a range of inequalities, notably inequalities based on gender, sexuality and age, in politics and in the law.

The controversy over the proposal to provide advice and information on sexual health and reproduction to young people, independently of schools, churches, GPs and parents, can be interpreted as a site of conflict over the connections between citizenship (especially the right to freedom of the person, and bodily integrity) and other identities.

There is a long-standing body of literature concerned with the connections between the state, through the mechanism of citizenship, and identity, and the consequences of these connections for equality. Citizenship is thought to be a universal category, which is best disconnected from the particular categories of national or other identities (Isin and Wood 1999:4). However, citizenship has always been allocated only to specific groups, despite its claims to universality. Both citizenship and other identities provide ways of marking group boundaries, the former carrying legal weight while the latter carries social and cultural weight (p.20). From the point of view of generating equality between those living in a shared region, the issue is how the realisation of equality implicit in citizenship is frustrated by interaction with other identities. For instance, the ways in which citizenship tends to be distributed on the basis of national identity rather than on the basis of residency, results in clear exclusions. Nevertheless, citizenship is usually regarded as an important resource in generating social and political power.

This is precisely what has been at stake in the north of Ireland, as the connection between substantial citizenship and Protestant Unionist identity has produced deep inequalities and consequently violent and long-term conflict. Citizenship and national or religious identity have been closely connected in Northern Ireland since partition in 1921 (Government of Ireland Act). The failure of the Unionist-controlled Stormont Parliament, and the violence characteristic of Northern Ireland society since the late 1960s has been explained as the outcome of Protestant unionist domination of political, economic and social structures (O’Leary and McGarry 1995; Ruane and Todd 1996).

However, to think of Northern Ireland as a society polarised into Catholic nationalist and Protestant Unionist camps is too simple. Ulster Protestantism is highly divided, incorporating both the apocalyptic militancy of the Reverend Ian Paisley’s Free Presbyterian Church and Democratic Unionist Party, and the relative liberalism of the Church of Ireland. The association between Unionism and Protestantism is historically contingent, as demonstrated, for example, by the Protestant leadership of the eighteenth century republicans, the United Irishmen, who famously sought to unite ‘Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter under the common name of Irish man’. Apart from the obvious gendering of this aim, it does indicate that the connection between religion and politics has been solidified through historical circumstance, rather than as a result of any necessary feature of either religious or political belief. The history of Protestant settlement in the North of Ireland in the seventeenth century, and the subsequent activities of the Orange Order in producing a collective identity loyal to the British Crown and superior to the native Irish, have been key factors in producing the assumed connection between Protestantism and Unionism, as well as between Catholicism and nationalism. Both Protestant Republicans or nationalists, and Catholic Unionists (known as ‘Castle Catholics’) are not unknown.
Thus, the connection between national identity and attitudes to the state and citizenship is complex, and depends on ongoing social processes. Nationality and religion are different types of identity, and while national identities in the North (i.e. the Irish nationalists and the British Unionists) have been defined by close reference to religion, the connection is unstable and depends on active mobilisation of the connection in specific contexts, including at the level of the state.

In the context of the Brook controversy, however, the Health Board’s plan to provide young people with a distinct service of their own complicated the way in which struggles for access to resources tend to be organised around competing claims for cultural or national recognition. The conflict over the clinic took the shape of a division between opponents of the clinic, who continued to seek strong official recognition for claimed cultural norms, and supporters of the clinic, who tended to make pragmatic and welfarist arguments, namely that the clinic offered the best opportunity for young people to become morally autonomous, and that this was the best way to ensure that the rate of teenage pregnancy would decline, and sexual health would improve (e.g. Scally 1992; Crawford 1999).

Opponents of Brook were faced with a dilemma, since the cultural norms they sought official recognition for were not clearly related to nationalist or Unionist identities. How could Unionists claim that these were the cultural norms of the Irish? Likewise, were these the cultural norms of the Northern Irish – again an identity often thought to be too compromised for those identifying as Irish, and too Irish for those identifying as British. Alternatively, were these the norms of the people of Ulster – something that nationalists would reject, not only because the six counties of Northern Ireland don’t encompass the nine counties of the province of Ulster, but also because Ulsterness has become associated with Unionism.

It is largely the discourses articulated by opponents of Brook and of extended abortion access in the region that I am concerned with here, which allows me to examine the complex tensions between the identities of sexually conservative nationalists and unionists as they justify their political campaigns by claiming that the state should recognise what they claim to be distinctive cultural values in the region. Where does this leave ‘Irish’ and ‘British’ identities? This is the question I will seek address in the remainder of this paper.

**Gender, Sexuality and the Politics of Cultural Identity**

*Activist Discourses*

Opposition to the establishment of the Brook clinic in Belfast in the early 1990s cannot be understood without reference to its situation within a broader opposition to abortion *per se*. Much of the opposition was based on the claim that it is young people’s sexual activity itself which causes abortion. Hence the two issues, sex education and abortion, are closely linked. 9

For example, the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children [SPUC], in their 2002 publication *A Way of Life: Affirming a Pro-Life Culture in Northern Ireland*, argue as follows:

‘Brook has no place in Northern Ireland. Its anti-life agenda for access to abortion and abortifacients, and its approach to sexual activity among teenagers, are offensive to the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland.'
The UK government should cease funding Brook and cease treating the youth of Northern Ireland with such contempt.’ [SPUC, 2002:79]

The evidence SPUC provides to substantiate these claims takes the form of statements made by a range of church leaders and politicians from across the political spectrum, often making largely unsubstantiated assertions concerning the attitude of their congregations and constituents to Brook and to abortion. Reference is also often made to a 1990 British Social Attitudes Survey showing greater opposition to abortion in the region than elsewhere in the UK, largely explained by the greater importance of religion in the province (e.g. SPUC 1991:12). This finding is widely quoted in the anti-Brook and anti-abortion literature.

In claiming that Northern Ireland has a distinctive ‘pro-life’ culture which should be recognised in the law, those who oppose the public provision of sex education for young people often compare the region with other parts of the UK, and with England in particular. For example, in its 2001 submission to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on ‘The Religious Rights of Parents and their Children within the Northern Ireland Education System, the Education for Chastity - Family Support Group argued as follows:

‘There has been an increase in the number of abortions in England, despite easy access to contraceptives, ‘the morning-after pill’, classroom sex education, and the presence of over 30 Brook Advisory Centres.’[Education for Chastity Family Support Group, February 2001:12]

This strategy of drawing comparisons between Northern Ireland and England points to the importance of the claim to cultural distinctiveness to those who resist public provision of impartial sex education and the extension of the British 1967 Abortion Act to the region. As Betty Gibson, the President of SPUC in Northern Ireland, put it:

‘I think it’s a built-in culture in the people, the family unit hasn’t broke, now it has broke some, but not entirely, as the rest of the UK has broke. And, no matter what you say, we’re a part of the United Kingdom, but we have, we’re maybe like Wales and Scotland, we have a different culture. And we work, you’ll get the extended family still going.’ (Gibson 2003)

The solution to the problem of high rates of teenage pregnancy and abortion, from an anti-Brook point of view, is to prevent young people from being sexually active or sexually aware at all. This would seem to fit with a general assumption that abortion is something that concerns only young women. From the perspective of Brook’s opponents, adults living in conventional families and abiding by Christian teaching on sexuality are not thought to be in need of either contraceptive information and advice, or access to abortion. For example, the Medico-Legal Enquiry Group, set up in opposition to the opening of Brook in the early 1990s, and describing itself as ‘a group of interested and concerned professionals’ (1992, paragraph. 1.01) argued that,

‘Abortion rates are increased by providing teenagers with contraception and permissive sex education. Although Brook has been operational on the mainland for 27 years, abortions on teenagers have almost doubled since 1970.’ (paragraph 3.14)
Here we see Northern Ireland’s low official abortion rate explained in terms of the absence of organisations such as Brook. The report concludes by recommending that sex education for young people should focus on abstinence and ‘traditional family values’ rather than emphasizing knowledge about sex and contraceptive methods, claiming that the US experience bore out the effectiveness of this approach (paragraph 5.19).

Although both these groups claim to be interdenominational, they are associated with distinct sides of the religious/political divide, with SPUC being regarded as a largely Catholic, and the Medico-Legal Enquiry Group as largely Protestant. Nevertheless, both are prepared to find common ground in their opposition to abortion access and publicly available sex education for young people.

One of the most vociferous anti-abortion and anti-Brook organisations in the North, known as Precious Life, which campaigns on a weekly basis in Belfast city centre, as well as protesting outside the offices of Brook and the Family Planning Association, seems to capture the way in which this lobby tries to bridge sectarian politics as an important strategy in making its case. This group was established in response to the example provided by a similar ‘direct action’ group in the Republic of Ireland, Youth Defence, which organises young people to publicly campaign and protest about abortion, and can often be seen on the streets of Dublin. While this connection with an anti-abortion organisation in the Republic might seem to give Precious Life a Catholic or Irish nationalist character, and indeed much of its rhetoric and activities do revolve around Catholic religious practices, it is run by a Catholic woman, Bernie Smyth, along with her Protestant husband, Derek Smyth. As their August newsletter of 2002 put it:

‘As an inter-denominational group, we encourage everyone from all different faiths to join our campaign for life. An [sic] perfect example of this is Bernie and Derek, a Catholic and a Protestant, totally untied in love, not only for each other, but also for the unborn child.’ Precious Life Newsletter Issue 12, August 2002:2

This seems to capture the gendered familial and broadly Christian claims that anti-sex education and anti-abortion politics is invested in. This way of characterising what is at stake in anti-abortion politics is captured by the ‘Welcome’ statement on Precious Life’s website, where they declare

‘Since our formation Precious Life has had a phenomenal growth, with people from many parts of the country rallying to the call to maintain Northern Ireland’s proud tradition as a pro-life nation.’ (www.preciouslife.net. Accessed 09/05/03 2003.)

This seems a strange description, given that Northern Ireland’s ‘troubles’ stem from the political conflict between two ‘nations’ inhabiting the same territory. Firstly, claiming that a ‘Northern Irish’ nation exists involves overlooking the political divide between ‘Irish’ and ‘British’ or Ulster nations. Secondly, claiming that such a ‘Northern Irish’ nation has a proud ‘pro-life’ tradition might raise some eyebrows, since it overlooks the extreme violence and high murder rates (McGarry and O’Leary 1995) of the last 30 years. It would seem that this discursive strategy
is aimed at excluding from the ‘Northern Irish nation’, and consequently from the political
debate, those who do not subscribe to an anti-abortion definition of what ‘pro-life’ might mean.

Nevertheless, much opposition to Brook, and to abortion, is couched in culturally defensive
terms. This seems particularly surprising given that the major anti-abortion and anti-Brook
organisations are often associated with a Catholic/Irish position (despite their claims to be
interdenominational), which is usually explicitly distinguished from the Britishness that informs
the identity ‘Northern Irish’. It is also surprising, given the violent recent history of the region. As
the President of SPUC, Betty Gibson, explained to me during an interview, when discussing her
fears for what the introduction of the 1967 British Abortion Act might mean for Northern Ireland:

‘I’m afraid that the people of Northern Ireland would lose the respect for life,
which they held on to for 30 years, they held on for 30 years of trouble because
you know when people were killed people here cried about people you didn’t
even know […] And I wouldn’t like to see our culture going like that.’ (Gibson
interview)

This form of politics, which involves making claims that the state should recognise a distinct
culture in regulating sex education and access to reproductive services, can be found not only in
the statements of conservative activists, but also in debates in the Northern Ireland Legislative
Assembly.

Official Discourses

The Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly debated abortion law in June 2000, when Jim Wells,
a member of the Democratic Unionist Party11 proposed the following motion:

‘That this Assembly is opposed to the extension of the Abortion Act 1967 to
Northern Ireland’

Although the Assembly doesn’t have the power to change the law on abortion, this power having
been retained by Westminster, Mr. Wells wanted to assert that Northern Ireland did not want the
1967 Act introduced. As he argued, in defending the motion:

‘We must send out this evening a very clear, cross-community message —
supported by different parties with different viewpoints — that the people of
Northern Ireland totally resist any extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to this
community. The way to stop that happening, to put the brakes on this process, is
to have a massive vote tonight in favour of my motion.’

A majority in the Assembly of 45 to 17 voted in favour of his motion.

During the debate, the assertion that the people of the region were anti-abortion across the
sectarian divide was repeatedly made. For example, the Reverend Dr. William McCrae, also a
member of the DUP, argued as follows:
‘Should this legislation be extended to Northern Ireland, it would be a travesty of justice and democracy. The vast majority of people, across the community, do not want it.’

This strategy of pointing to the non-sectarian character of the anti-abortion lobby implied that there was cross-community consensus, thereby seeking to undermine those concerned with defending reproductive rights. For instance, Edwin Poots (DUP) drew parallels between those who favoured the extension of abortion access in the region to those who had supported violence during the troubles:

‘Some of those who are opposed to the motion were happy enough to be the apologists for murder in our Province over the past number of years, and so it is not surprising that they are content to allow unborn children to be murdered.’

The reference here may be to Sinn Fein and the Progressive Unionist Party, both of whom, together with the Women’s Coalition, voted against the motion, although few of the parties can claim complete disconnection from the political violence of the recent past. Monica McWilliams of the Women’s Coalition criticised attempts to exclude some opinions from the debate. As she said in response to an interruption during her speech:

‘All I would say to Mr Roche [interrupter] is that we dealt with a very cold house here on many issues, and it is neither fair nor right to try to exclude people who have different views from him or me on this issue.’

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it seems that reproductive rights for young people and women have become important in a range of otherwise competing political projects.

The connection between religion and national identity in Northern Ireland takes place in distinctive ways in the field of sexual morality, sex education and reproductive rights. Rather than dividing communities, as religious or cultural politics in the region usually does, this arena of politics relies on emphasizing an apparently shared ‘pro-life’, Christian, familial culture. This provides a way of distinguishing Northern Ireland from Britain, rather than from the Republic of Ireland, and consequently ensuring that reproductive law and service provision remain distinct.

Where does this leave the otherwise mutually exclusive ‘Irish’ and ‘British’ identities? As Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern have noted in their 1997 text:

‘A common piece of graffiti in Northern Ireland is the slogan ‘We are the People: Prods rule OK’.’ (1997:iix)

The phrase ‘the people of Northern Ireland’, is often regarded as a unionist identity. That some of those identifying as Irish in the region are prepared to make political claims under this identity is noteworthy. It seems to indicate a form of Irishness that is more religious than politically nationalist. Indeed, Betty Gibson, President of SPUC NI told me that she now votes not according to nationalist politics, as is overwhelmingly the case in the region, but according to a party’s stance on abortion and sexual morality, and she is prepared to cross sectarian lines to do so.
Similarly, anti-Brook and anti-abortion Unionists are also prepared to make common cause with their political opponents on this issue, through reference to a broadly Christian common culture. Some commentators have noted a Unionist move away from thin contractual politics towards a thicker cultural politics, in response to the peace process, as evidenced by the self-conscious development of an ‘Ulster Scots’ linguistic culture (e.g. Graham 1997). However, it seems to me that the politics of sexuality and reproduction also points to a religious or moral form of cultural politics whose primary aim is not to distinguish Ulster from Ireland, as Ulster Scots is intended to do, but to distinguish it from the rest of the UK. Hence, in this context, morally conservative unionists are prepared to make common cause, in cultural terms, with those otherwise usually regarded as foreign.

Needless to say, this way of seeking legal recognition for a claimed cultural identity has equality consequences for women and young people, whose access to sexual and reproductive services are significantly more restricted than in the rest of the UK. Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern’s argument that, as they put it,

‘… the crisis facing Ireland, North and South, Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist, is to reconceptualised who ‘the People’ are in order to achieve a new social and political consensus’

seems to overlook the ways in which political consensus can be built on the basis of strong gender and age inequalities. Claims for recognition of a sexually conservative common culture in Northern Ireland clearly compromise the citizenship rights of women and young people.

Notes

1 Mary Crawford, the manager of Brook Advisory Centre in Belfast, has described the intimidation the centre’s staff and clients have been subjected to: ‘Since February 1998 this [high profile anti-abortion] organisation has picketed Brook on a monthly basis, as well as having mock “funeral” marches from the City Hall, with individuals dressed in black with red roses, white crosses and disturbing graphic material on posters. They have placed my name and Brook's senior doctor's name on placards stating “…… facilitates the murder of unborn babies”. They have stood outside the Centre shouting “murderers” and they have told young people that we tell lies. This body has publicly stated that it will close Brook down and its spokesperson has said that she will ensure that I will lose my job. During the summer my neighbours received letters outing me as the Centre Manager of Brook and stating that I sent “70 young girls a week for abortions in England”. This is the climate of intimidation that staff in Brook have to deal with.’ (Crawford, November 1999)

2 For example, the August 2002 (Issue 13) newsletter of anti-abortion protest group Precious Life carries a photograph on page 6 of a protester outside the Brook Centre holding a poster that declares ‘Brook means abortion’.

3 For example, as Paul Berry, a member of the DUP and the Legislative Assembly, who sat on the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee, explained to me: ‘I think there would be a concern with those within pro-life that the Brook clinic would certainly be advising people on abortion, and that has been a major issue within Northern Ireland.’ (Interview 22nd May 2003).

4 It is also regulated by Section 25 (1) of the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945. The relevant judicial decisions are: R v Bourne [1939] 1 KB 687; Northern Health and Social Services Board v F and G [1993] NI 268; Northern Health and Social Services Board v A and others [1994] NIJB 1; Western Health and Social Services Board v CMB and the Official Solicitor (1995) unreported. In addition, the law on
access to abortion has recently been interpreted in In the matter of an Application by the Family Planning Association of Northern Ireland for Judicial Review. Neutral Citation No. [2003] NIQB 48

5 Writing about the impact on abortion law in Northern Ireland following two court cases in 1994, one involving a suicidal young woman, K, who was a ward of the state, and the other a suicidal 24 year old woman, A, Lee argues: ‘The paradox of abortions in Northern Ireland, in the aftermath of K and A, is that while the law regards … [where the woman’s life is at stake] as the most compelling ground, that is the one where the K case shows doctors not carrying out an abortion here, … [where the woman would otherwise become a mental or physical wreck] appears to be the law but there was sufficient doubt for a court case in A [sic], while … [where there is a substantial risk of serious handicap] is rumoured to be the most common ground for abortions here yet it is the one which is least likely of the first four to be lawful and the one which has not been litigated. … [Cases of rape or incest] mentioned in all opinion polls, has never been a distinct ground for abortions in these islands although it would probably be covered by [where the woman would otherwise become a mental or physical wreck].’ (1995:38)

6 This point was made by Justice Kerr in his recent judicial review of abortion law in Northern Ireland In the matter of an Application by the Family Planning Association of Northern Ireland for Judicial Review, Neutral Citation No. [2003] NIQB 48, paragraph 55.

7 This is something that Justice Kerr, in his decision on reviewing the state of the law, underlined: In the matter of an Application by the Family Planning Association of Northern Ireland for Judicial Review, Neutral Citation No. [2003] NIQB 48, paragraph 1.

8 Whelan (1996)

9 Some Catholic and Protestant sex education organisations, such as Education for Chastity and Love for Life have been established to either lobby for, or themselves provide courses in sex education for schools, based on their religious interpretation of the Department of Health’s Guidelines for providing sex education (Department of Education for Northern Ireland, 2001).

10 For instance, the booklet quotes the Social Democratic Labour Party [SDLP] spokesman on Health and Social Services, Dr. Joe Hendron, a practicing medical doctor in a socially deprived area of Belfast: “The vast majority of people in the Province, be they Catholic or Protestant, are implacably opposed to the extension of the 1967 Act to Northern Ireland … My own experience is that the vast majority would not consider abortion.” [SPUC, November 1991:2]

11 ‘[The DUP’s] electoral base, crudely speaking, consists of rural evangelical Protestants and urban secular working-class Protestants – while its leadership derives almost exclusively from evangelical Protestants who have thrived on a politics of fear.’ (McGarry and O’Leary 1995:405-6)

12 SPUC President, Mrs. Betty Gibson, drew a similar parallel during her interview with me: ‘Why are we shouting for gunmen to stop shooting people and we’re going to kill unborn?’

13 The parties who supported Mr. Well’s anti-abortion motion were the Democratic Unionist Party, the Northern Ireland Unionist Party and the Social Democratic Labour Party. The Ulster Unionist Party and the Alliance Party were divided in their votes.

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