



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Probation officer with a practical approach

Sean Lowry, who has died aged 75, was a former head of the Probation Service.

He was a gentle, soft-spoken family man. Known for his acute sense of social justice, he was dedicated to practical action on problems, whether individual or social, rather than just complaining about them.

Throughout his working life, he devoted himself to helping people bring about positive changes in their lives, and in the context of those on probation, to "rethink their criminality".

Born in Belfast, Lowry's involvement in social work began when he was a priest in the diocese of Down and Connor in the 1960s, when his experience led to him being asked to do a social work course at Queen's in Belfast.

During the Troubles he assisted displaced families to access housing and other services, and his work led to him receiving formal recognition from the British government.

By May 1973 he had left the priesthood and joined the Probation and Welfare Service in Dublin. There were 39 probation officers then, a time that marked the beginning of significant organisational development and growth.

He rose quickly through the ranks and became principal probation and welfare officer in July 2002. His signature approach to projects was collaborative and consultative, always including and engaging with those concerned in decisions.

At each stage in his career, he enjoyed being at the cutting edge of developing front-line services, whether working in Belfast with up to 30 voluntary social service centres to develop effective responses to civil conflict or in Dublin developing the probation role in special schools, establishing the Bridge (intensive probation) project and shaping service development nationally.

Co-operation

He was particularly supportive of **North-South** co-operation in probation, including in the establishment of the **North-South Irish Probation Journal**, which had its 12th edition published last year.

After retirement in 2005, he was invited to contribute to a number of projects on behalf of the Department of Justice.

His wife, Teresa, predeceased him in 2005. He is survived by his partner, Catherine, son Tim, daughter Gráinne, and four granddaughters.

Source: The Irish Times

7 March 2016

Republic of Ireland 'afraid of us leaving' EU, claims DUP's Gavin Robinson

The Republic of Ireland would become isolated if the UK left the European Union, the DUP claimed.

Irish concerns were motivated by fear of losing a major ally in Europe, East Belfast MP Gavin Robinson alleged.

He gave evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of MPs about the impact of Brexit and said the Irish government had benefited through its relationship with the UK at Brussels.

"They are afraid of us leaving because they will lose their big friend in Europe.

"Their concern is more to do with losing their big mate in a big pool and that they will become quite isolated should we choose to leave."

The committee is examining the potential impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland, including relations with the south. The DUP favours an exit and has previously minimised the impact for issues such as **cross-border** security.

Mr Robinson said there were common travel arrangements between Britain and Ireland before EU accession and there would be afterwards.

He attacked critics of Brexit who have warned it could jeopardise the peace process.

"I think that touches to a base level of politics, of concern and fear which I think is not suitable nor of a credit to anyone who should raise those."

Sinn Fein Stormont MLA Megan Fearon said Ireland **north and south** was better in the EU.

"All sections of our society from agriculture, business, education and the community and voluntary sectors have received practical support, including funding, from Europe.

"The EU has also been a major supporter of the development of the peace and political processes over the last two decades.

"As an MLA representing a border area, I know only too well the negative impact of partition. That would only be reinforced with a new European border.

"Ireland, **north and south** is better in the European Union and we cannot allow policies directed from the south-east of England to change that."

Source: Belfast Telegraph

New deals after Brexit 'doable' but policing would be 'slower and more costly'

The UK will not become a safe haven for terrorists and international organised crime gangs in the event of Brexit, Northern Ireland's top police officer has said.

PSNI Chief Constable George Hamilton told MPs that if the UK splits from the EU new bilateral agreements would have to replace existing treaties on data sharing, extradition and investigations.

He said new arrangements would be more expensive, clunky and not as slick as the current systems.

"Some of the public commentary from within the broader policing community around the UK becoming a safe haven for organised criminals and terrorism and all the rest of it personally is not my position," the Chief Constable said.

Mr Hamilton told the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee the transition to new **cross-border** policing would take two years.

The MPs were told new international justice agreements would have to involve rules on joint investigations to allow domestic laws to be used in a host country and a replacement European Arrest Warrant system for extradition.

They also heard agreements on sharing DNA records, fingerprints, biometric data and vehicle registrations of suspects and co-operation against terrorism under the Prum convention would also need to be rewritten.

The Chief Constable cited the example of bilateral treaties signed by Switzerland and Norway with EU states and the PSNI's good working relationship with US police and justice chiefs.

"I think all of this is probably doable with an exit but it would be slower, complicated and more costly ... from a practical policing perspective," Mr Hamilton said.

PSNI Assistant Chief Constable Will Kerr told the MPs that physical borders are becoming less of an issue for policing international organised crime and that the increasing threat to security and law and order is online.

"The borders tend to be less and less relevant now," he said.

"Organised crime gangs can operate largely with impunity I have to say in China or Eastern Europe or in the Ivory Coast and can very effectively, with almost call centre organisation, extort and bribe, particularly around sexual impropriety in many other parts of the world."

The Irish border is 224 miles long with 292 crossing points and the committee was told there is "more or less unfettered access" into Northern Ireland from the Republic.

The officers said there is some evidence of illegal immigrants moving from the Republic to Northern Ireland and human trafficking but not on the scale it has been portrayed in some quarters. The PSNI put the figure as less than hundreds.

"The old style of border security ... how effective they actually were in monitoring movement across the border and stopping terrorist attacks and so on, they actually became more of a target for attacks," the Chief Constable said.

"Whatever model in the event of an exit we come up with we would like to be giving a view, an operational policing perspective, that would be much more intelligent than simply building walls and sangars and crossing points."

The Chief Constable declined to criticise retired police chiefs who have spoken out on the Brexit debate, adding: "I'll not talk about other people, I'll talk about myself - seven years after I leave office the only place I will be commenting is TripAdvisor."

The committee, which is examining the potential impact of a split from the EU on Northern Ireland, including relations with the Republic, also took hours of opinions from business figures at Stormont.

Source: Belfast Telegraph

9 March 2016

Garda cuts on Irish border 'are facilitating terrorism'

YEARS of cuts to garda numbers in border counties have helped terrorists, officers in the Republic warned yesterday.

The claim came as the PSNI said dissident groups were planning a number of attacks here over the coming weeks, following a bomb in east Belfast that hurt a prison officer.

The Garda Representative Association (GRA) warned that a lack of resources in counties along the border could help republican terror groups.

It warned that on some nights, just a mere handful of gardai are on duty along the Donegal border with Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh.

"Frustration about lack of resources is turning to anger about the dangers they are exposed to," said a GRA spokesman.

"Successive governments have decimated policing to a level where it is barely functioning and staffing levels are so low that members fear for their safety.

"Cross-border criminals, drug dealers and terrorists are out there and our members feel they are being put at risk by being exposed to them without adequate back-up from either uniformed or armed colleagues."

There have even been reports of some gardai working extra hours for no extra pay in an effort to tackle the criminal gangs.

While the last Irish Government reopened the force's training facility at Templemore, garda chiefs have said it will take years for numbers to reach levels seen seven years ago.

This is a position backed by GRA representatives along the border, who warned that gardai retiring will outnumber those being recruited.

The organisation's Donegal representative, Brendan O'Connor, said: "While some new recruits are being located in Donegal, the fact is they are only replacing gardai who are leaving the force, and as a result there is no actual increase in numbers. In fact, the opposite is true. It is not even making up for the outflow."

He said the number of gardai in rural areas was also being hit by a lack of resources in the county's four district headquarters.

"Gardai are being brought in from rural stations into the larger stations to cover gaps there," Mr O'Connor added.

"We welcome new recruitment to An Garda Síochána, but that rate of recruitment will not replace what we have lost.

"It will be a long time before we get back anywhere near the numbers required for an effective police service."

The PSNI is on the highest state of alert, fearing terrorists will use the 1916 Rising events to carry out more attacks.

Officers stop cars at a vehicle checkpoint along the border

Source: Belfast Telegraph

Cross-border business boss tells of fears for economy over UK exit from EU

A UK exit from the EU could mean "rowing back" on the "positive work and progress" achieved in the last decade across Ireland.

That's according to Thomas Hunter-McGowan, chief executive of **cross-border** business body InterTradeIreland.

Raising his concerns over the impact a Brexit could have on Northern Ireland, Mr Hunter-McGowan said "unravelling the economic impact on the Northern Ireland region from the rest of the UK makes a challenging position impossible".

"What is clear, however, is that anything that hinders the free flow of goods and services will have a negative economic impact on both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland," he said.

"InterTradeIreland works closely with the two Governments in both Northern Ireland and Ireland and indeed the wider EU Community to ensure that the proper structures and supports are in place to support economic development and foster greater **cross-border** trade across the island of Ireland.

"To this end, we have made significant progress in creating a positive economic environment resulting in strengthened trade links and **cross-border** trade worth over £2.6bn annually."

The group was set up following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, building business and other programmes across Northern Ireland and the Republic.

Mr Hunter-McGowan said: "For over 15 years InterTradeIreland has worked as a **cross-border** agency on an **all-island** basis, enhancing **north-south** trade relationships, despite different trading environments, to help SMEs deliver sustained **cross-border** trading growth to the benefit of both economies. The myriad of systemic links across the border has generated synergies and facilitated the growth of the economies in both jurisdictions."

And he said while "nobody can predict with certainty what the actual effects of an exit vote would be" a remain vote "removes this uncertainty and allows companies to stay on ground that they are familiar with".

Source: Belfast Telegraph