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## State files: West Londonderry's Protestant exodus deemed 'unstoppable'

4-5 minutes



The Fountain enclave in west Londonderry

The formerly classified state papers, dating from 1993 and 1994, has been put up on the internet by the university's CAIN wing (the Conflict Archive on the Internet).

They are the latest edition to the sprawling CAIN website, which has been actively compiling Troubles-related records since 1997.

Anyone can now peruse the freshly-added documents easily themselves at this link: [cain.ulster.ac.uk/proni/index.html](http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/proni/index.html)

Among the documents is one dated July 29, 1993, from the private secretary to Patrick Mayhew (who was the Tory Northern Ireland secretary at the time).

It is an account of a meeting between Mr Mayhew and top officials concerning the make-up of the city.

"The Secretary of State began by referring to the significant

reduction in the number of Protestants on the west bank in Londonderry, from as many as 18,000 25 years ago to around 3,000 now – with only about half of those of voting age,” the formerly confidential document says.

“To some extent this was a replication of what has been happening in north Belfast, although it was difficult to see how the claim could be made that the Protestants were being driven out, rather than just moving away.

“In discussion, it was suggested that this was an irreversible trend.”

The idea of ploughing public money into the remaining Protestant enclaves in west Londonderry was discussed.

A new primary school was being built in the area, and an effort were being made to attract 400-or-so people back to the Protestant-dominated Fountain estate with upgraded housing.

Nonetheless, Mr Mayhew said “this decline had been going on for over 20 years and there was little the government could do to reverse it”.

A series of bulletpoints at the end state that the reasons for the Protestant decline included “PIRA violence” and “electoral support for Sinn Fein” – adding that whilst it may be possible to “stabilise” the exodus, it was “probably unrealistic to believe can be reversed in foreseeable future”.

The document concludes by saying: “For the moment, the case for injecting large sums of money into the area was not proven.”

According to the 2011 census, the three District Electoral Areas which make up the Cityside part of Londonderry (the part on the western side of the Foyle) had a total population of 59,282 between them.

The News Letter’s calculations reveal that 3,178 of them were Protestant (about 5.4%).

Further documents give accounts of meetings with SDLP figures John Hume and Mark Durkan.

The latter voiced concern that Cityside Protestants increasingly felt “isolated and marginalised because of the lack of representation”, while the former “had made strong representations for the government to do something in the Protestant Westbank area”.

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Alistair Bushe

Editor