

**AN EVALUATION OF THE
PEACE TRAIN ORGANISATION**

PREPARED FOR : CENTRAL COMMUNITY RELATIONS UNIT

PREPARED BY: RESEARCH AND EVALUATION SERVICES

MAY 1993

CONTENTS

- 1.0 INTRODUCTION
- 2.0 METHODOLOGY
- 3.0 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF PEACE TRAIN ORGANISATION
- 4.0 STRUCTURE OF PEACE TRAIN ORGANISATION
- 5.0 STAFFING
- 6.0 ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER
- 7.0 STRANDS OF ACTIVITY
- 8.0 MATCHING IF ACTIVITIES WITH CCRU OBJECTIVES
- 9.0 DISCUSSION
- 10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

APPENDIX 1: DRAFT CONSTITUTION FOR PEACE TRAIN ORGANISATION

APPENDIX 2: PEACE TRAIN ANNUAL REPORT 1992/93

APPENDIX 3: DECLARATION FOR MILLION SIGNATURES CAMPAIGN

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In February 1993 Research and Evaluation Services was commissioned by the Central Community Relations Unit of the Department of Finance and Personnel to conduct an evaluation of the Peace Train Organisation (PTO) as part of an ongoing commitment to reviewing the operation and effectiveness of organisations for which it provides grant funding. The objectives of the research as set out by CCRU in it's brief to consultants were;

To identify the objectives of the organisation and assess the closeness of fit to those which CCRU sets down for bodies which it funds

To identify the funded activities of the organisation and assess their appropriateness and completeness in forwarding the objectives

To comment on the impact and effect which the funded activities have on their client groups

To comment on the fitness of the organisation to carry forward it's business.

The objectives which CCRU has for the projects it funds are;

To create structures which will permit a greater degree of cross community contact

To implement effective ways of addressing community conflict issues

To increase mutual respect and understanding between different parts of the community.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this evaluation consisted of semi - structured in-depth interviews with the Development Officer and six members of the Northern Regional Executive Committee of the Peace Train Organisation, and analysis of relevant documentation. Those interviewed included;

Seamus Lynch, Democratic Left member of Belfast City Council

Eileen Bell, Development officer and prospective Alliance Party Councillor

Sam McAughtry, (Chairman), Writer and Broadcaster

Liam Kennedy, Lecturer in Social and Economic History, QUB

Chris and Michael McGimpsey, Prospective Official Unionist Councillors

David Pritchard, Peace People

3.0 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF PEACE TRAIN ORGANISATION

The Peace Train Organisation came into being in 1989. The original idea is attributed to Pronsais De Rossa, a Workers Party T.D. in Dail Eireann, who together with other interested individuals decided to form a pressure group to oppose the ongoing bombing campaign against the Dublin /Belfast rail link. The idea was taken up by like minded individuals in Northern Ireland, initially by Chris and Michael McGimpsey, who formed a Northern contingent to co-operate with the group in Dublin. Eventually support committees were established in both London and Glasgow.

4.0 STRUCTURE OF PEACE TRAIN ORGANISATION

The original concept of the Peace Train Organisation was devised after the coming together of interested parties in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and in England. As such the organisation has an existence and structure beyond that part currently being evaluated. The present administrative structure of PTO is as follows;

- A. One Executive Council (EC)
- B. Three Regional Executive Committees in Belfast, Dublin and London (REC's)

4.1 Role of Executive Council

The Executive Council of PTO is designated to meet not less than three times per year. The role of the Executive Council is defined in the constitution *inter- alia* as

1. To maintain the integrity of PTO by ensuring unity between all three R.E.C's.
2. To establish the policies of PTO.
3. To oversee programmes formulated by the R.E.C's
4. To ensure such programmes conform with PTO policy and constitution
5. To establish criteria for activities
6. To seek wider awareness of PTO objectives and activities.
7. To elect it's own officers, viz. Chairman, secretary and treasurer provided all E.C. membership present at each

inaugural meeting of the E.C. shall be consulted as to the election of officers.

4.2 Membership of the Executive Council

The Chair person of each R.E.C. shall automatically be a member of the E.C.

One person other than the Chairperson shall be appointed to the EC by each REC.

Two seats on the E.C. shall be filled by members not serving on any R.E.C., elected at the Annual General Meeting.

4.3 Role of Regional Executive Committees

The N.I. Regional Executive Committee is designated to meet not less than three times per year at least one being an A.G.M., and being within one month prior to the A.G.M. of the Executive Council. It's role is specified to include inter-alia;

To raise funds and seek support from public agencies, private organisations and individuals in order to meet the cost of their own activities the administrative costs of the Executive Council and any activities approved by the E.C. and undertaken by any of the Regional Executive Committee's

To organise and co-ordinate all area support groups within their own jurisdiction as they think fit

To decide on staff requirements and to enter into and terminate contracts

To draft their own constitution and standing orders for approval at their own A.G.M. and ratification by the Executive Council. Such constitution shall not in whole or in part contradict the constitution of the Executive Council.

5.0 STAFFING

From it's inception in 1989 to the the beginning of the CCRU funded pilot year in March 1992 the organisation operated on a purely voluntary capacity. During the pilot year and currently Peace Train is staffed by a Full time development officer assisted by a part time administrative assistant working 25 hours per week. During the pilot year the development officer was absent from the post for three months due to being part of a party delegation to the Northern Ireland political talks process. During her absence (for which she was not paid) part of her salary was channelled to employ another Executive Committee member to fulfil her function.

6.0 ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

As with many small voluntary organisations the role of the development officer embraces a general variety of functions. Among those identified with this post are;

Servicing the Executive Committee

Handling the day to day running of the office

Researching new activities and initiatives for the organisation

Bringing ideas to the Executive Committee for consideration

All practical organisational work relating to the management of events staged by peace train Organisation.

Given the lack of continuity in this post during the pilot year it is difficult to establish the proportion of time devoted to each element of the work. However it is possible to deduce that all four months for which the temporary development officer was employed was spent researching the million signatures campaign and that a further £2500 was paid out in consultancy fees to an ad-hoc employee to research the possibility of a "release the peace" concert. This suggests a high priority being allocated to this aspect of the work. Given that the former initiative has achieved only 12% of its target and that the latter never got off the ground at all there seems to be an unacceptably high proportion of void energy being expended.

7.0 STRANDS OF ACTIVITY

The output of the PTO in terms of concrete activities can be itemised in the following way in chronological order.

October 1989 - Inaugural peace train running from Belfast to Dublin. This train ran from Belfast to Dublin where it picked up southern travellers who joined for the journey to Belfast before making the return journey to Dublin. In total about 1000 people were on the train. As the train made the return journey to Dublin it was disrupted by a bomb on the line and many of the contingent who had got off the train at Belfast travelled to Portadown to show solidarity with the Dublin contingent by staging a sit in on the train overnight.

October 1990 - Founding convention in Portadown. Took the form of a seminar at which a decision was taken to formally launch Peace Train as an organisation. The conference also endorsed the support of the Peace Train Organisation for

Families Against Intimidation and Terror (FAIT), another fledgeling group opposed to paramilitary violence.

May 1991 - Conference at Stranmillis College on the theme of "Confronting Paramilitary Violence". This conference which the organisers had anticipated having 500 delegates only was attended by 200 delegates. The conference was addressed by several academics prominent in the study and analysis of terrorism.

July 1991 - Peace Train organised jointly by the regional committees in Belfast, Dublin and London travelling from Belfast to Dublin and on to London by boat train. Approximately 1500 people took part in this initiative.

February 1992 - Peace train "shoppers train" from Dublin to Belfast. This was organised by the Dublin committee to show support for the people of Belfast in the aftermath of a sustained wave of bombing in Belfast city centre. The Belfast committee organised through the Belfast Chamber of Trade for those on the visit to be given special discount vouchers for the main city centre stores. Approximately 1200 people travelled from Dublin and they were joined by a further 500 local supporters of Peace Train.

June 1992 - Million Signatures Campaign. This was an initiative which sought to achieve one million signatures throughout Ireland to the following declaration

"I the undersigned, without prejudice to my political or religious affiliations, declare that it is my belief that the way to a just and peaceful society in Northern Ireland cannot lie in the continuation of violence by paramilitary organisations;

I therefore call for a total cessation of violence by both republican and loyalist paramilitary organisations, to allow the appropriate elected politicians to address the current political crisis by democratic means.

I confirm that this is the only occasion I have signed this petition"

The method employed to gather signatures was the holding of public sessions in various urban centres throughout Ireland. Within Northern Ireland members of Peace Train took the declaration to each of the 26 District Council areas and in all except two were given endorsement by the Mayor or chairperson of the council. This campaign has not been time limited and is still in operation at the time of writing.

October 1992 - Peace Train to Derry to demonstrate solidarity with people in the North West. The train had approximately

900 people on board of whom about 350 were school children from a range of Protestant and Catholic schools in Belfast. These pupils had previously taken part in a demonstration for peace held in Belfast a few weeks earlier. The travellers were given a civic reception at the Guildhall in Derry by the local council

8.0 MATCHING OF ACTIVITIES WITH CCRU OBJECTIVES

The activities of Peace Train to date have been restricted to two principal forms, the physical running of train journeys to various destinations (with surrounding activities) and, the million signatures campaign.

The main community reconciliation value of the train journeys themselves seems to lie in the bringing together of both public notaries and "ordinary people" from different religious traditions and political perspectives for the common purpose of renouncing violence. The trans national structure of the organisation is also in theory about establishing solidarity between all the people of the British Isles committed to peaceful means. This in theory would have a high correlation with CCRU objectives. The difficulty is in determining the processes by which this is actually achieved (if at all) in concrete terms. The Peace Trains do not appear to have a structured format for interaction between those of traditions, nor are there any arrangements for follow up activities which could lead to meaningful exposure. Due to this situation, opportunity for constructive contact are left to chance. It is therefore the opinion of Research and Evaluation Services that this activity has only medium correlation with CCRU objectives.

The million signatures campaign, as a purely petition based initiative appears to have a low correlation with CCRU objectives.

9.0 DISCUSSION

The Peace Train Organisation developed in late 1989 as a protest vehicle against the continuous bombing and the threat of permanent closure of the Dublin-Belfast rail link by the Provisional IRA. The PTO sought at a practical level to point up the inherent contradiction in the IRA claiming to support a united Ireland and at the same time bombing the main communication link between the two parts of the island. The organisation has now expanded it's remit to protest against all paramilitary violence, especially how it effects the civil liberties of citizens. The Peace Train's principal method to date has been the organisation of a number of chartered trains between Belfast and various destinations which have attracted as passengers, people who support the protest and which also attract extensive media coverage.

9.1

The Peace Train Organisation has succeeded in achieving a high degree of cross party involvement in and support for its activities, primarily between members of the Official Unionists, the Alliance Party, the Workers Party and the faction of the Workers Party now known as Democratic Left. Support from the SDLP and the DUP, although initially hesitant, is now considered to be solid. Whilst such consensus is an unusual achievement in the context of Northern Ireland politics, it simultaneously raises the question of the extent to which Peace Train is a political pressure group rather than an organisation actively engaged in the creation of structures which will permit cross community contact. However some members of peace train make the point that political violence per-se has a negative community relations impact and any initiative which helps address this can contribute to a climate conducive to improved community relations. It was evident to the researcher that the PT executive committee members interviewed in the course of the evaluation brought to the PT philosophies strongly coloured by their own political analysis. For instance, whilst opposed to all forms of violence, they unanimously believe republican violence to be the root cause of most of Northern Ireland's divisions and that loyalist and state violence (where it occurs) are reactive to this. Some committee members see the Peace Train as being about confronting the IRA to intellectually justify their campaign of violence whilst others dismiss the notion of even indirect dialogue with paramilitaries as politically unacceptable.

9.2

As the scope of this evaluation was restricted to focus on the organisation itself, it has been difficult to assess the extent to which activities have had an impact on the general public. PTO believes it enjoys widespread support at a variety of levels in Northern Ireland and can cite anecdotal evidence to illustrate this. However there is little known about the characteristics of those who made the journeys on the peace train or the types of perspective they represented. It is an important evaluation outcome that no such information has been assembled by the organisers and that no structured format has been devised to harness or nurture any contacts friendships or goodwill developed by Peace Train through it's headline activities.

9.3

The development of the PTO to date does not indicate an organisation guided by a clear strategic vision. As a single issue campaign it has been successful in highlighting public objections to the bombing of the railway line and arguably to effecting a reduction in such attacks. Developing the

organisation beyond this point is essential for it to have a meaningful and effective role in the future. What this role is to be appears to be the subject of some dichotomy within the Peace Train committee. Some members see the future role as being to remain a campaigning group organising high profile responses to particular terrorist related events. Such issues as the systematic murder of taxi drivers or construction workers are examples of those thought to be appropriate. The exact format of such initiatives or their likely impact is not yet in an advanced stage of thinking. Another school of thought is that peace train should become more actively involved in the "peace process", with longer term, lower profile objectives. In such a scenario it is difficult to identify the distinctive contribution which peace train can make as compared with other established players in this field.

9.4

Two reasons are commonly advanced for the lack of progress during the lifetime of PTO, particularly during the twelve months of pilot funding from CCRU. These have been the lack of continuity brought about by the participation of the Development Officer in the Political Talks process for four months in the middle of the year, and, the involvement of many other Executive Committee members as party activists in the forthcoming local government elections. This is seen as one of the disadvantages of a committee heavily weighted with active politicians. The organisation reports attempts to broaden the membership to attract to the committee those with more free time to commit to this cause. Indeed it is one of the major failings of peace train that despite staging several highly publicised events it's current membership level stands at approximately fifty in Northern Ireland.

9.5

The British isles structure of peace train means that it has an overall membership of around 350 so it is fair to say that outside of N.I. the organisation has attracted greater support. This has been especially the case in the South of Ireland where there appears to be solid support for peace initiatives in general. PTO would claim that this dimension is one of the most important facets of it's existence and that in direct community reconciliation terms the regional structure of peace train helps promote reconciliation between all the people of the British Isles. Due to the limited direct exposure of people from different traditions to each other via Peace Train activities, any benefits appear likely to be dependent on their own public relations value and may therefore be short lived.

9.6

The only initiative apart from its core activity undertaken by PTO has been the Million Signatures Campaign. This sought to get one million people on the Island of Ireland to sign a declaration condemning paramilitary violence. Despite allocating considerable time and resources to this project, it has at this point in time only collected one hundred and twenty thousand signatures and appears to have lost most of it's momentum. The impact which this initiative could have had at any level, even if successful, is open to serious question, given the ephemeral nature of such petitions. There is also the possibility that having achieved so little of it's target may actually have had a damaging impact on the image if not the substance of peace brokering.

9.7

Although it might have been expected that the pilot year with CCRU funding would have been sufficient for the Peace Train Organisation to establish it's long term viability, it is only in recent months that it has ratified it's formal constitution and begun to seriously consider where it goes from here. The researcher found evidence of serious discussion amongst members of the executive committee as to the proper future role of PTO. If, and only if, this introspection results in the development of a clear strategic plan, and, dependent on the content of that plan, will it be possible to assess it's value in community relations terms. Given that PTO appears to be very much at a cross roads in it's development, it is perhaps unfortunate that the evaluation was carried out at this point. A more conclusive evaluation might be possible at a point in the not too distant future.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CCRU should extend funding for a further year, rather than for three years, to allow time for the Peace Train to demonstrate that they have put into effect a clear development strategy. Such a strategy is not yet evident but there are clear signs that the need for it has been recognised and that attempts are under way to formulate one.
2. CCRU should reinforce to PTO as a condition of any further funding the types of output it considers appropriate for projects which it funds.
3. CCRU should give considered assessment to the value which it would place on any initiative which brings politicians from across the political divide in Northern Ireland to work together for a common purpose. This does not have a high correlation with CCRU objectives as specified and may be within the remit of another agency.

4. Peace train should be encouraged to give precedence to an initiative highlighting Loyalist paramilitary violence. To date its campaign has been almost exclusively directed at republican violence. Such a display would almost certainly make it clear that the organisation was unequivocal in its operation and this would be likely to broaden it's appeal and acceptability.