

POPULATION, EMPLOYMENT AND URBANISATION TRENDS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Northern Ireland has experienced many of the problems of social, physical and economic development on a daunting scale. For the present, unfortunately, to these have been added the problems of civil unrest. As in other areas of Western Europe, the search has been for methods to alleviate the problems, and Northern Ireland, through the local administration, has been evolving policies to co-ordinate the various aspects of regional policy.

Of major concern has been the evolution of economic policy and, of course, this has not been in isolation from the issues of social and physical planning. In this paper, the point of departure is an examination of the process of change which is likely to be necessary in seeking economic expansion. From this base, some comments can be made of how far the experience in recent years is consistent with this process. In the relatively recent past (the mid-1960s), the basis of economic and physical planning has become more formalised. The timing and logic of these changes are of interest, particularly with reference to the earlier trends and the perceived needs of the Province. In early 1976, just a decade after the introduction of more formal planning mechanisms, Government has indicated a wish to review some aspects of its strategy, and its proposals form the basis for some critical comment on how the analysis has evolved.

Despite the incursion of tangential ideas, the discussion below tries to follow the path as sign-posted above.

A. The Process of Economic Change

Since the purpose of this paper is to discuss the implications of Urbanisation and Regional Development, there is an implicit recognition that the process of regional development and urbanisation has, and may continue to create problems, and therefore it is desirable to examine whether the trend towards urbanisation (however defined) is necessary and, if so, how some of the adverse features may be removed or ameliorated. Essential to this examination is a statement and assessment of the objectives to be set for society and some analysis of their implications.

Recognising that economic objectives are not regarded as the only objective for society, and with a promise to relate the social and physical objectives to the economic at a later stage, for the moment the assumption is made that economic goals will have a major dominance in the setting of objectives, and on this basis there is relevance in examining the implications *solely* of the major economic objective of raising living standards in the region.

The Sources of Economic Growth

Standards of living in Ireland, north and south, are (on average) less than 60 percent of the average in the EEC. Such a large difference gives one yardstick to justify attempts to improve the position, and, in absolute terms, the existing standards leave many problems of poverty and hardship.

An increase in the standard of living requires an increase in the real value of the goods and services produced per person and this might be achieved by:-

- i) increasing the net output per employee through improved efficiency and/or increased investment per employee, (this investment must, of course, be capable of earning *more* than the cost of its borrowing)
- ii) replacing employment which generates 'lower' incomes by new employment which can generate and support the payment of 'higher' incomes,
- iii) increasing employment, in total, by an amount which secures adequate reductions in unemployment, and
- iv) increasing emigration, particularly of those who would earn 'lower' (or no) incomes. (Whilst theoretically possible, in the real world this would not be likely to command support).

For non-economic reasons, Government may take steps to retain employment in firms which cannot create continuing incomes at their present level. This represents an acceptance that the living standards of one group are being maintained by others (the taxpayers) and means a lower (average) standard of living. (This is not to say that the standard of living might not be even lower, in the short run, if the employment disappeared and none of the employees were re-employed).

In a major trading economy, the main constraint on economic development is the ability to sell to others an increasing volume of goods and services on a competitive basis, since higher living standards mean a demand for a greater volume of imported goods and services. Just as a family raises its standard of living by earning more (whether by extra work, more efficient working or a better paid job) so that it can purchase more: so also does a county, region, or town. Bigger transactions *within* a family do not usually increase total family income (unless internal supplies replace those from external sources).

To raise living standards, the income generated in a region has to grow more quickly than the rate of population increase and in some circumstances, with a larger population of children or retired people in an area, the output per employee may have to rise simply to hold living standards constant.

The process of economic change in Northern Ireland has caused major developments in the industrial sector and, combined with the contraction of employment in agriculture and the expansion of employment in service industries (the tertiary sector), the existing spatial patterns of employment and population are likely to be affected. Spatial patterns will also be affected by the changing wishes of people as standards of living rise and there is greater flexibility in planning the relationship of the place of employment, residence and leisure activities.

The need for urban re-development may also have an influence on the pattern of economic change. Progress with slum clearance and improved communication patterns may facilitate the raising of living standards by encouraging the expansion of employment in revived urban centres.

If the objective of Government policy is to raise the average standards of living as much as possible (and without regard to secondary objectives) - in both the Republic and Northern Ireland - then there is an implied commitment to the logic of what this involves in terms of people, jobs and the spatial dimensions.

Restraints on the pursuit of economic objectives

An unambiguous commitment to the raising of living standards as quickly as possible, without any qualification about secondary objectives, would be unlikely to command political support. The resistance to such a commitment probably comes in three general forms.

The first would be expressed as an objection to the principle of devising policies orientated towards the raising of living standards. This view is sometimes attributed to those who feel that material well-being, for the community as a whole, is adequate and that, rather than strive for higher standards which, if achieved, may change the whole nature of the society, the objective should be to preserve the cultural and social character of our society by policies which place emphasis on the problem of equality, justice and fairness in society. In its extreme form this could produce a situation where full employment was more important than higher living standards - even if that full employment was produced by lowering the average standard of living through artificial job creation financed by taxation.

The second group of objections would be those which would qualify the basic objective. The aim of raising living standards as fast as possible would be acceptable, provided that certain secondary considerations were also taken into account. Examples of these are:-

- i) the rate of decline in agricultural employment must not *force* farmers to leave the land if they want to remain,
- ii) the higher average standard of living should be accompanied by some narrowing of the differences in living standards between the poorer and richer sections of the community, and
- iii) the creation of new employment should be 'fairly' spread so that the problems of

existing unemployment are alleviated without large population movements.

The third group of objections would be from those who would not accept that there was any necessary logical inconsistency between the objective of maximising the rate of increase in living standards, reducing unemployment and ensuring that the benefits of higher living standards were spread throughout the area (region or province) under consideration. They would, in consequence, not accept that the policies designed to promote economic development imposed any major constraints on areal physical and social development.

These classifications attempt to codify a range of reactions to the setting of a policy objective for Government in terms of material well-being (in goods and services) for the community. In reality, the reactions cannot be neatly codified and there is a whole spectrum of qualifications and objections. The difficulties are first, to test the evidence on the various hypotheses and, second, to identify those issues where 'evidence' will not provide an answer and leave these for political decision. In the latter category would fall the basic question of whether economic growth was indeed a primary goal for the community.

For this discussion, the assumption on the acceptability of a goal of higher living standards has been made. From this base, it is appropriate to examine:-

- a) the likely changes in the structure of employment, and
- b) the degree to which population and employment have moved and may need to move geographically in Northern Ireland.

B. Recent Experience in Northern Ireland

The post-1945 experience in Ireland, North and South, has been a complex amalgam of continuing levels of unemployment which were, and are, high by comparison with the position in other countries in Western Europe, relatively low standards of living, and undesirably high rates of emigration. Increasingly, Northern Ireland Government policy has been directed to measures to remedy various aspects of this situation and since the mid-1950s some conspicuous improvements have been recorded. How far these can be attributed to the effectiveness of Government policy, or alternatively how far the changed circumstances should be attributed to competitive pressure of an international nature, particularly, for labour supplies and convenient industrial locations, is not clear. That there is some doubt is, however, of considerable importance when assessing future policy since, at best, Government policy on regional development with its effect on population, incomes and physical planning can only have been partially responsible for the relative improvement in recent years.

In the period 1958-1972, Gross Domestic Product per person in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland increased by just over 60 percent in real terms. Compared to the earlier period from 1945-1957 and to an increase of less than 40 percent for the United Kingdom as a whole in the comparable period this seems a favourable result. However, by EEC standards, these rates of growth were not remarkable and were slightly lower than the average rate of growth for the whole EEC.

The faster rate of growth in GDP per head in Northern Ireland, when compared to the rest of the United Kingdom, arose mainly because of the restructuring of manufacturing industry which occurred, *inter alia*, because of:-

- a) the availability of labour supplies,
- b) the lower level of average earnings (a gap which was narrowed during this period),
- c) the shortage of labour in most other areas of the United Kingdom,
- d) the scale of industrial development financial assistance, and
- e) the physical and infrastructural provisions for development.

Just to itemise this process of change and these contributory factors serves to emphasise that the development process was largely urban orientated and further that the main developments were probably in the larger urban centres. This is partly illustrated by the changing distribution of total employment.

The above table draws attention to the greatly diminished proportion of employment (but not necessarily income) from agriculture. The *fall* in the number employed in manufacturing and the *rise* in the numbers employed in tertiary services of all kinds, at first sight, seem inconsistent with the earlier statements on the degree to which manufacturing contributed to the faster rate of economic growth. However, within the manufacturing sector there have been substantial changes.

The process of change is even more clearly demonstrated by the following table showing how 'new' industry has replaced the 'old'. 'New' industry is defined as the employment provided in projects which have been created since 1945, usually with Government assistance.

TABLE 1: *Employment in Northern Ireland*

	1950		1960		1974 ²	
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%
Agriculture	101	18	79	15	42	7
Manufacturing	194 ¹	36	193	35	178	32
Construction	35	6	40	7	50	9
Services	216 ¹	40	233	43	294	52
<i>Total</i>	546	100	545	100	564	100

1 Estimate based on later revisions to SIC

2 Estimated by adjusting 1971 figures by changes recorded in the annual census of employment

TABLE 2: *Manufacturing employment*

	1950		1960		1974 ¹	
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%
Shipbuilding	25	13	26	13	11	6
Textiles	75	39	61	32	43	24
Clothing	33	17	26	14	24	14
Other	61	31	80	41	100	56
<i>Total</i>	194	100	193	100	178	100

1 1974 is not exactly comparable with 1950 and 1960 because of changes in methods of measurement.

TABLE 3: *Manufacturing employment*

	'New' industry	Other industry	Total	'New' as a % of rest
	'000	'000	'000	'000
1950	22	172	194	13
1960	40	153	193	26
1970	76	112	188	68
1974	75	103	178	73

TABLE 4: *Employment proportions, 1971*

Travel to work areas	Population ¹	Total in employment	Percent of all Northern Ireland manufacturing in the area
	'000	'000	%
Belfast region: -			
Belfast	725	297	57
Lisburn			
Newtownards			
Bangor			
Carrickfergus			
Larne			
Craigavon ²	94	43	10
Londonderry ²	108	34	7
Ballymena ²	130	50	9
Newry	62	18	2
Enniskillen	50	18	2
Coleraine	49	17	2
<i>Sub-total</i>	1218	477	91
Rest of Northern Ireland	310	80	9
<i>Total</i>	1528	577	100

1 The population and employment figures are not strictly comparable since the former are based on local authority boundaries and the latter on employment exchange areas.

2 Craigavon includes Banbridge; Ballymena includes Antrim and Magherafelt; Londonderry includes Limavady.

The inflow of 'new' industry has mainly been urban orientated and has been particularly concentrated on the major urban centres. As a result, the position in the main urban areas was, in 1971, as shown in Table 4.

In the urban travel to work areas is to be found 86 percent of the population and 91 percent of all manufacturing employment; expressed even more narrowly, in the Belfast region is to be found 47 percent of the population and 57 percent of the manufacturing employment.

Although the evidence to substantiate this proposition is not readily available in the most useful form, the recent history has probably been one of: -

a) an increasing proportion of industrial employment occurring in the main urban centres, and

b) an increasing proportion of the total population and total employment living and working in the main urban areas.

A partial indication of population movements is given by the following table which shows, on the basis of the former local authority classifications, the changing population in 'urban' and 'rural' areas in Northern Ireland.

The apparent fall in the proportion of the population in urban areas is a reflection of the spill-over of population in the greater Belfast area into 'rural' areas. This is illustrated in the following table which shows that the proportion of the population in rural areas of counties other than Down and Antrim continued to decline slowly, although the shift in employment terms was probably larger since commuting into urban centres to work has probably increased.

The two major sources of new employment in the past two decades have been the restructuring of the manufacturing sector, which has probably been associated with a drift of employment to a small number of the larger urban areas, and the expansion of 'service' employment. When analysed alongside the decrease in agricultural employment and in industrial employment in some (smaller) centres, these features point to a pattern of:-

- a shift from rural to urban-based employment which would, in part, be concealed in the *total* population and employment figures for an area within which the change took place,
- a slow rate of employment increase in the smaller areas (including the smaller urban centres), and
- a faster rate of growth in the areas containing the larger urban centres.

For the relatively short period from 1959, a crude test of these propositions is possible. Using a simple Spearman rank correlation coefficient a number of comparisons has been made.

The first test was of the rank correlation coefficient of the *increase* in the numbers of insured employees and the total number of insured employees in an area. For men and women, together, for the period 1959-74, this produced a coefficient of $r=0.54$, which was not very encouraging.

Because of the growing proportion of women who seek employment, and because of the low proportion, by United Kingdom standards, who are registered as insured employees, the same test was undertaken for *male* employees only. The results were more consistent with the propositions which have been advanced.

TABLE 5: *Population*

	Urban areas	Rural areas	Total	Percentage in urban areas
	'000	'000	'000	%
1926	639	617	1,256	51
1937	<u>690</u> ¹	<u>590</u> ¹	1,280	54
1951	750	621	1,371	55
1961	772	653	1,425	54
1966	790	695	1,485	53
1971	801	735	1,536	52

1 Belfast Rural District transferred to 'Urban' as Newtownabbey Urban District from 1951.

TABLE 6: *Urban and Rural Population Proportions*

	Urban	Rural	
		Antrim and Down	Rest
	%	%	%
1926	51	23	26
1937	54	22	24
1951	55	23	22
1961	54	24	22
1966	53	26	21
1971	52	27	21

The *increase* in male employment was compared with the following variables with the results as shown: -

- 1) Size of total male employment in the area (1959-74) : 0.78
- 2) Distance of the area from Belfast (1959-74) : 0.41

These calculations should ideally be completed for as long a period as possible. Short-period results can be influenced by single projects. However, for the 15-year period, the result is consistent with the general hypothesis that male employment has expanded most rapidly in the larger urban areas.

During this period there has been a general allegation that increases in employment in Northern Ireland were mainly in the Belfast area. The result, for the same time period, of a calculation based on *distance* from Belfast, not size, is of lower value, although it may still be significant.

To produce this confirmatory evidence does not, however, identify the process of causation. Was this process a natural one, uninfluenced by Government but affected by demographic trends and independent location decisions - or was it created by Government policy towards the location of industry and the location of Government services of all kinds?

Subjectively, the arguments indicate that this process was aided by Government policy. Government reformed a whole range of public services and local Government services which have, if anything, tended to concentrate 'service' employment in the larger centres. Government also assisted the expansion of new industry, particularly by its factory building programme which attempted to spread new industry but seems to have been more successful in the larger centres. In one respect Government policy was partly counter to this trend. When offering financial assistance to industry, the Department of Commerce has usually said that it would offer higher rates of assistance to firms locating outside the Belfast region.

C. Planning, Since 1963

Prior to the early 1960s, the Government of Northern Ireland tackled the problems of industrial development with little integration of industrial promotion with any overall plans for physical development. The general theme seems to have been to try to attack unemployment by attracting industrial development to the Province and to offer the incoming industrial project some freedom of choice on location or, where particular infrastructure

services were needed, to provide infrastructural developments where possible "on demand". Particular examples of this were the water supply arrangements for some of the large man-made fibre plants, housing developments near to new factories and local industrial training centres.

A number of factors came together to change this approach. First, the then Ministry of Commerce, in one of the more successful periods of its work, realised that some large projects could not be sited satisfactorily in a reasonable period of time. Some pre-planning of infrastructure services - specifically for industry - was needed. Second, the competitors of the Ministry of Commerce, in Great Britain and elsewhere in Western Europe, were becoming more refined in their approach to industry and this included an appreciation that financial assistance was a necessary but insufficient feature of policies relating to industrial location. Third - and accidentally the trigger for change - the *social* problems of the city of Belfast had become acute, particularly in the need for a major drive to provide housing.

The system which had developed in the 1950s relied on the Ministry of Commerce to provide industrial assistance, but gave the Ministry very little effective leverage on, for example, reluctant or lethargic housing authorities and water suppliers. Both these functions rested with the 67 local authorities and the water boards (where these were separate). Since boundaries were critical in determining costs and benefits (e.g., between urban and rural districts) and advance planning was sometimes seen as a burden on the present generation, enthusiasm for development was often stronger, than the action taken.

In late 1963 the Matthew¹ Report was published and, although often wrongly regarded as a province-wide document, conceptualised the problems of the need for a province-wide assessment of policies for physical planning. In 1965 the Wilson² Report pointed to the economic logic of some of the Matthew proposals. Matthew suggested, *inter alia*,

- limits to the development of the Belfast area - by the enforcement of a stop-line to building development around the City (which on this definition included Lisburn and Newtownabbey),
- alternative centres of development (i.e., alternative to Belfast) at Lurgan, Portadown, (now, Craigavon)

Antrim, Ballymena,

Bangor

Carrickfergus

Larne

Newtownards

Downpatrick

"to arrest the drift from the rural areas to Belfast and further afield" - industry should be concentrated in the following *key centres*: -

Londonderry

Coleraine

Omagh

Dungannon

Enniskillen

Newry

Since 1963 it has often been forgotten that Matthew had no remit to be detailed in his proposals outside the defined Belfast region. With the later criticism of the lack of plans for some towns outside the Belfast region and with the comparison, for example, of the plans for Londonderry with those of Craigavon, and with the benefit of hind-sight it is easy to suggest that the fault lay in the absence of a province-wide remit in Matthew's terms of reference or a further more aggregative analysis of the needs of this Province.

Matthew saw his proposals as a plan "to de-magnetise the centre and re-invigorate the many attractive small towns in the (Belfast) region" (para 84). Although the Matthew proposals were endorsed by Wilson, the endorsement was probably based on economic arguments for concentration rather than dispersal of effort. With some licence, Matthew's proposals seem to change in the Wilson approach to become -

- a limit to the continuous development of the Belfast area by planning controls to preserve and recreate the physical amenity of Belfast,
- the retention of the attractions of growth in the Belfast area by making the following centres in the Belfast region ready to accommodate expansion: -
 - Bangor
 - Carrickfergus
 - Larne
 - Newtownards
- for the rest of the Province, industrial development needed labour, facilities and services which should be made available on an adequate scale in a limited number of centres; the fewer the better -
 - Craigavon
 - Ballymena - Antrim
 - Londonderry
- other centres were to be prepared for smaller-scale expansion -
 - Coleraine
 - Omagh
 - Dungannon
 - Enniskillen
 - Newry
 - Downpatrick

The main theme of the Wilson Report, as it related to physical planning has been summarised³ as an argument that economic growth could not be achieved without a major re-distribution of population. This was the change needed to alter the population distribution from that which had grown up to meet the needs of an agricultural community with a limited specialised industrial sector, mainly in textiles and clothing. Although the Wilson and Matthew Reports have been generally interpreted as being mutually supporting, in fact there was a major shift of emphasis, by Wilson, to economic priorities which subsequent Government action appeared to endorse.

Although the period from 1964-69 was one of rapid industrial expansion, it cannot be argued that the Wilson approach had been sufficiently developed to contribute to this in a major way. The inability to locate some new industries which were 'on offer' was, however, an indication of the size of the problem when dealing with large projects.

Only in more recent years can it be argued that the Wilson philosophy could be tested

since large-scale co-ordinated development is now in evidence in Craigavon and to a lesser extent in Ballymena and Londonderry. As a result of the civil disturbances and the general economic recession, it is unfortunate that there is so little new industrial development in the United Kingdom, that Northern Ireland's ability to offer better facilities cannot be put to the normal competitive test in stable conditions and more than a little unfair to argue that the policy of encouraging industrial development in these centres has failed.

The 1970 Review

In 1970 the Northern Ireland Government invited its Consultants (Professor Sir Robert Matthew, Professor Wilson and Professor Parkinson) to review the Development Programme for the period 1970-75. In the section related to physical planning they noted "the strategy ... has been broadly right as far as it went, but some modification and shifts of emphasis are desirable. It now requires to be fully and more vigorously implemented⁴".

Once again, however, the emphasis changed. The Government accepted that the policy should be continued but changed the terminology. The emphasis was now on centres designated for "accelerated industrial growth"⁵ which were to be -

- a) the Greater Belfast area, including Craigavon
- b) Londonderry
- c) Ballymena, and
- d) eight key centres: Newry, Coleraine, Larne, Dungannon, Omagh, Enniskillen, Strabane and Downpatrick.

A number of features of this strategy were of interest.

- 1) Craigavon was seen, as Matthew originally saw it, as part of the Belfast area.
- 2) The emphasis on the needs of Londonderry was more marked.
- 3) Larne was treated as being outside the Greater Belfast area.
- 4) Strabane was added to the list of key centres.
- 5) Some small specific extensions to the Belfast urban building stop-line were accepted to provide land for industry and housing.

For the Greater Belfast area, Ballymena and Londonderry, the commitment was made that they would be "heavily orientated towards the accommodation of major industrial projects and, even where there is a degree of risk, forward provision of infrastructure for industry and to cope with population growth in excess of the natural increase". Presumably, therefore, this was not to apply to the other areas, including the key centres.

The decision to vary the 'stop-line' around Belfast was an interesting manifestation of the pressure which had built-up to allow easy development in the Belfast urban area, which had had to be resisted in order to reinforce development elsewhere in the Greater Belfast area.

Further Reconsideration, 1975

In February 1975, the Northern Ireland administration published a further discussion paper on the approach to physical planning⁶. Basically, this paper supported a further amendment to the scheme of priorities for the allocation of public resources. In addition, to the designated growth centres, or centres of 'accelerated industrial growth', and the named key centres the suggestion was that a further category should be added - District

centres. Presumably, with some forethought, these District centres were to be the towns on which the re-shaped structure of local Government had been based, but which were not already designated as key centres. The new group included -

Armagh
Ballymoney
Ballycastle
Limavady
Banbridge
Cookstown and
Magherafelt.

The discussion paper reached this conclusion by examining six different strategies and dismissing the five others. Some of the options were formulated presumably with little real conviction.

- 1) The *laissez-faire* option: in so far as this postulated 'no guidance ... in respect of the location industrial development' this was an unreal situation. Since government funds must be spent on infrastructure *somewhere*, a strictly neutral strategy is virtually impossible.
- 2) The linear Belfast option: this suggested that the Belfast - Craigavon axis should become the major growth area and would deny resources for expansion virtually everywhere else. This strategy was inconsistent with a gradual shift in the distribution of employment and population and could have been positively harmful to continued industrial and service employment elsewhere and was presumably not seriously advocated by any set of interests.
- 3) The diffusion option: in order to allow the population to remain as widely spread as at present, this strategy would have needed means to provide sufficient employment in the existing towns and small villages. Such tactics would have implied a reversal of present trends and some unknown means of obtaining more employment which is difficult enough to generate by concentration in the use and provision of public and private services.

If these three were not for serious consideration, then the more interesting options were -

- 4) the Growth Centre strategy: concentrating on Belfast, Craigavon, Ballymena and Londonderry,
- 5) the Growth and Key Centre strategy: continuing the present approach, and
- 6) the District Towns strategy: adding seven district towns to the network in option (5).

These strategies are essentially, either the present policy (5), a more concentrated policy (4), or a more diffuse pattern of development (6). The preferred option, which was accepted as a Government commitment on December 23, 1975, was the latter. In addition to the Belfast region (including Lisburn, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey), Northern Ireland is to have 18 towns with official preferential development status. At first sight it seems that the growth and key centre approach has been eroded to the point of disappearance.

D. Reflections For The Future

a) Diffusion of Effort

For the foreseeable future, Northern Ireland will have to use finite resources to try to

meet various objectives. At no point are the Government's spending plans likely to be less than the revenue available. Against this there is a whole complex of objectives - centred on economic and social goals.

If the physical planning strategy is that available resources should be spread over a large number of urban centres, it follows that this will mean a smaller amount of resources for each centre than would have been made available to a smaller number of centres. In relation to economic objectives the major concern is whether this will reduce the attainable level of expansion. On balance, the judgement is likely to be that it will.

A counter argument is that this judgement, which essentially depends on a view of the effects on industrial development, is over-pessimistic since the main logic of the larger growth centres is to cater for the larger type of industrial project. The implication is that smaller projects can go to smaller centres and there will be many smaller projects. However, this ignores the degree to which (1) even small projects sometimes need the specialised services of a larger centre and (2) there are economies of scale in providing for larger and smaller projects in one area.

Too great a diffusion of efforts to secure industrial projects, out of limited resources, must be presumed to generate less employment. The Government may recognise this but they only concede that "...the development of District Towns will not be easy at a time when it is difficult to attract new industrial investment" (Press statement, December 23, 1975).

A better justification for the new strategy in Northern Ireland was to be found in the 1975 Discussion Paper (p27). When referring to the District Towns the argument was advanced that these towns were likely to become centres of administration, distribution and services *but* "it is *not* essential that all should attempt to attract a large volume of new industry ...". If this is the real thinking behind the new strategy then the following advantages emerge. -

- The main preparation for industrial development will still be concentrated. Tertiary employment is growing faster than manufacturing and the distribution of this employment is less likely to need to be so heavily concentrated in the main growth centres.
- The rate of change of population distribution will be easier to achieve with less social disruption.
- Politically, the strategy will be easier to advocate.

However, the Government do not describe their preferred strategy in these terms, so that this argument may be an over-generous interpretation of the discussion.

b) Confusion of terminology

Northern Ireland is really a very small place - in area and population. However, in a 35-mile radius of Belfast, an area containing up to one million people, official concepts envisage seven centres of growth. In fact, this may be a confusion between what is really (at most) three growth centres and seven urban centres. With modern approaches to public services, particularly transport, it is conceivable that several urban centres can be one growth centre. A growth centre is usually seen as the area from which labour supplies are drawn and public utilities and commercial services are provided on a convenient basis. In this way, a growth centre should be defined not as a continuous built-up area, but as (for

example) the area within which people are prepared to travel to work. This would mean that several of the centres named as key or district centres are in real terms merely subdivisions of a single area (e.g., Belfast, Carrickfergus and Larne)⁷.

Over-Ambitious Targets

The civil disturbances and the falling birth-rate have combined to reduce the urgency of large-scale planning to meet an anticipated population increase. Of course, although the population may grow more slowly, there are still plenty of opportunities, for social and economic reasons, to improve the physical infrastructure.

TABLE 7: *Population Projections*

As forecast in: -	Population forecast for 1975	Population forecast for 1985	Population forecast for 2000
1966	1,591,000	1,737,000	2,091,000
1970	1,578,000	1,705,000	1,984,000
1975	1,545,000	1,583,000	1,717,000

The scale of the changed expectations on population, which have implications for employment, housing and many public services, can be illustrated from the forecasts of the population of Northern Ireland.

Already, in 1975, the population is 46,000 lower than was expected in 1966 when plans were being considered. In the planning for the year 2000, the population is now expected to be 374,000 lower than was forecast 10 years ago. On this basis, the building of growth centres, or other towns, is going to be much slower than anticipated.

During the decade, the birth-rate has fallen by nearly a quarter. If this fact alone had contributed to the reduced population forecasts, then, in the year 2000, the population would have been some 200,000 lower. This means that the increase in emigration caused by the troubles may take over 150,000 extra people out of the population for the year 2000.

Conclusions

- 1) Changes in the forms of employment which have taken place in recent decades have already caused a significant change in the distribution of population and employment in Northern Ireland.
- 2) To obtain the best possible living standards for the population, these changes, in the direction of employment generating higher incomes, need to be further encouraged.
- 3) The basis of future prosperity depends on the ability to produce and sell goods and services to countries and regions outside Northern Ireland. The main problems are, therefore, to ensure the viability of an expanding manufacturing sector and retain an efficient agricultural industry.
- 4) Industrial development policies and the expansion of tertiary employment, will be correlated with a greater concentration of their activities in urban centres.
- 5) Development of these sectors, to maximise the rate of economic growth, may produce some conflict with social objectives (see below).

- 6) Recent employment increases in Northern Ireland have shown a tendency to occur in the larger urban centres. The theory that employment tended to go 'East of the Bann' does not provide an explanation for recent changes.
- 7) Physical and economic planning, by the Northern Ireland Government, has been based, *inter alia*, on the acceptance of priorities to prepare for industrial development. This will have some influence on the distribution of population.
- 8) The strategy of physical planning has been refined in stages, but the role of the growth centre has been central to official thinking.
- 9) The inclusion of all district towns in the planning strategy need not necessarily weaken the industrial strategy if the district towns are essentially seen as centres of tertiary employment, although some may attract limited industrial development. (The Government has not been forthright enough to make this clear).
- 10) By naming individual 'towns', in the physical planning strategy, attention may have been deflected from the notion of the growth centres as a wider area than a single urban unit.
- 11) A policy based on economic objectives need not conflict with as many social objectives as is sometimes feared, (see (4) above). Since industrial development and tertiary activities do not spring up overnight, the rate of change in the distribution of population can be quite slow. The social objectives of amenity, conservation, rehousing and improved communications need not be inconsistent with a plan for the fastest rate of economic development.
- 12) Since the population is now going to grow more slowly than forecast, then there may be an opportunity to use the new social capital to the greater benefit of the smaller population.

REFERENCES

- 1 "Belfast Regional Survey and Plan" (*The Matthew Report*) Cmd 451.
- 2 "Economic Development in Northern Ireland" (*The Wilson Report*) Cmd 479.
- 3 See "Growth Centres in Ireland" by Black and Simpson, *Irish Banking Review*, September, 1968.
- 4 *Development Programme 1970-75*, p19, para 66.
- 5 *Northern Ireland Development Programme 1970-75; Government Statement* Cmd 547, para 51.
- 6 *Regional Physical Development Strategy 1975-95*.
- 7 In 1960, 41,000 per day commuted to work across the Belfast boundary. *Matthew Report*, ch 12.