

This undignified human rights wake is futile

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Monica McWilliams' human rights conference in Belfast yesterday was a mourning for the wholesale rejection of the human rights industry's wild ideas,



says **AUSTEN MORGAN**

THE Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission – the quango established by Brice Dickson and passed to Monica McWilliams – continues to get a bad press. This is just.

The human rights community (a section of the public-sector middle class) has, since the Belfast Agreement, done nothing for peace, democracy and constitutional rule.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998, so the activists thought, made them a fourth branch of government. They proffered themselves as the experts on international human rights standards.

Their expensive record shows them to be washed-up political radicals, who, in any major liberal democracy, would have been tested to destruction in reformist parties.

Ministers in Belfast and London have not adopted any of their pet schemes. The assembly, but not parliament, sends them proposed legislation: again, they have made no impact on elected representatives.

And, as for the judicial branch of government, judges in Belfast and London mainstreamed human rights from 2000, without help from Northern Ireland's old, and new, university.

The commission, and its supporters, fatally overreached themselves on the bill of rights project. In 1998, the Human Rights Act was on its way. The Belfast Agreement permitted further advice.

Strangely, while the human rights community has indulged Catholic nationalism (on political violence, sectarian education and sexuality), the commission was not interested in all-Irelandism.

Nor, despite its fake internationalism, has it been concerned about the wider United Kingdom (the state we are actually in).

Wee Ulster – where the quangocrats try to rule with the bureaucrats – was the focus of Brice Dickson's 2001 and 2004 bills. The rise of the commission was to be the sole measure of human rights progress.

The bill of rights forum of 2006-08, which wanted to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 18(1), conclusively alienated unionists and the non-sectarian Alliance Party.

Monica McWilliams followed suit, with her draft bill of rights of December 2008, containing more than 120 new proposals. Every day at Temple Court (the commission's

tion, the Human Rights Consortium, enthusiastically championed this bill of rights. The advertising industry profited.

Atlantic Philanthropies provided the resources. And the commission also took Chuck Feeney's dollars, to campaign – like a non-governmental organisation – for the full implementation of its advice.

Why did the Northern Ireland Office not sack the commission majority in 2009 for such unconstitutional conduct? The answer is: the surviving political strategy – following the restoration of devolution (Paisley/McGuinness) – of luring mainly republican terrorists into shallow water; 'human rights', in the form of an ultra-left commission, was still necessary bait.

The Brown government, however, definitively rejected the wee Ulster bill in 2009, unconvincingly arguing for its feeble United Kingdom alternative.

The Conservative-Liberal coalition, to its credit, stopped the future foreign funding of Northern Ireland's radical politics. And Owen Paterson has reiterated David Cameron's idea of a bill of rights and responsibilities (on which I advised in 2007-10 as an independent member of the Lyell commission); this, however, has still to be negotiated with Nick Clegg's liberal democrats.

Monica McWilliams organised a conference in Belfast yesterday on the future of human rights in the UK. The galaxy of metropolitan stars, including a 'guest speaker', was not a change of heart.

The commissioner – who is doing a Mary Robinson and quitting early – betrays her constitutional ignorance on Westminster not being able to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998; and on the need for regional bills of rights.

The commission is looking for British allies of wee Ulster. The Waterfront turned out to be a tower of Babel. This was no rally. It was an undignified wake.

And we will be able to read the following on the tombstone of the human rights community (recent commission folie de grandeur in reply to Stephen Farry-MLA): 'It is not for the first time that the commission has had to remind elected politicians that it is their comments which could be regarded as interference in the work of a United Nations-recognised institution.' Hmmm!

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