D.T.E.D.G.

FILE

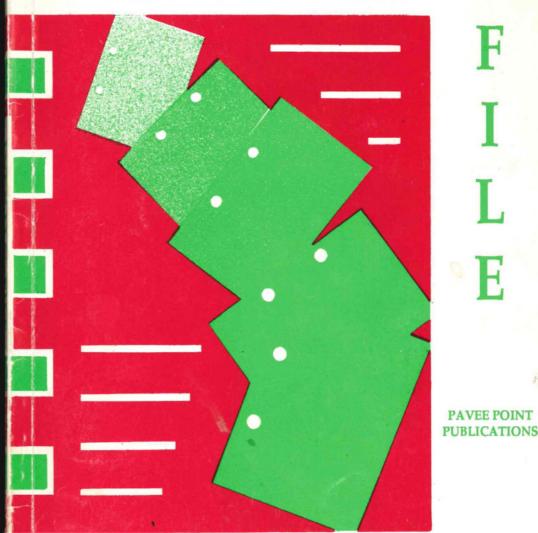## IRISH TRAVELLERS
New Analysis and New Initiatives

D.T.E.D.G. FILE

IRISH TRAVELLERS:
New Analysis and New Initiatives

D.T.E.D.G. FILE

IRISH TRAVELLERS:
New Analysis and New Initiatives

Preface

The Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group is a mixed group of Travellers and settled people that was founded in 1985. The work of the DTEDG is based on four strategic goals:-

1. The endorsement of and support for Travellers' right to self determination and equality in Irish society.

2. The recognition and revitalisation of Travellers' cultural identity.

3. The development of anti-discrimination and anti-racist policies and practices, which protect Travellers' way of life.

4. The achievement of inter-cultural dialogue between Travellers and the sedentary population.

The work of the DTEDG has been characterised by innovation and creativity. The innovatory nature of the project is rooted in its analysis of the situation of Irish Travellers and in the community work approach it has adopted. The analysis is based on an acknowledgement of the ethnic identity of the Travellers and of the racism experienced by the Traveller community. The community work approach is based on principles of empowerment which promote Traveller participation and addresses issues from a collective standpoint.

The Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group is part of the European Community 'Poverty 3' programme. It is one of the innovatory measures under this programme. 'Poverty 3' is an E.C. initiative. It aims to promote the participation of those experiencing exclusion and to create structures that bring the state, the social partners and the voluntary sector together to address social, political and economic exclusion.

As part of the 'Poverty 3" programme the DTEDG has worked to establish a range of transnational links. Part of this work has involved participating in a range of seminars both in Ireland and throughout the rest of Europe. The DTEDG has contributed papers to these conferences on a number of occasions. The purpose of this publication is to gather these papers together and to make them more widely accessible.

The papers published in this collection are placed in chronological order. As such they demonstrate a progression and deepening of the thinking within the project. The papers detail and describe aspects of the analysis and the approach pursued by the DTEDG. Ethnicity and racism are explored and their relevance to the Traveller community traced out. A framework is provided that sets out and evaluates the different analyses that inform work with the Traveller community. A seperate paper details the theory and practice within a community work approach. There is also a specific focus provided on Traveller education and on the Traveller economy.

This book is part of a series of publications being produced by the DTEDG. These publications seek to address the lack of published material that reflects the changing context within which Travellers are now seeking to assert their rights. Other publications include *'Pavee Pictures'*, a photographic essay of Irish Travellers, *'Traveller Ways, Traveller Words'* and *'Nomadism Now and Then'*, both of which are collections of Traveller folklore, which have all been prepared by the Traveller Culture/Heritage Centre in Pavee Point. The DTEDG is also publishing the mid-term review of its work within the 'Poverty 3' programme.

CONTENTS

Working with Irish Travellers

by John O'Connell

Over the past few decades Irish Travellers' traditional rural way of life has changed dramatically. Industrialization, urbanization and modernization has transformed that way of life and Travellers have, at times, become the focus of much public attention mostly hostile. However, Travellers have consistently resisted efforts to assimilate them into mainstream society. While many have moved into houses others have become outspoken in defence of their right to retain and develop their separate and independent way of life.

In recent years antagonism towards Travellers has grown and residents associations have organised to ensure that Travellers are not allowed into their areas. Church leaders and politicians have been provoked into responding to these issues.

It was at a time, in 1983, when opposition to Travellers in Dublin was particularly strong that the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group (D.T.E.D.G.) was formed. This voluntary organisation comprised of Travellers and settled people was set up by a group of professionals from different disciplines who, in dialogue with Travellers, set out to examine the situation at that time. An analysis of existing models of working with Travellers revealed that both statutory and voluntary sectors had been more concerned with integration and settlement than with self-determination and rights.

The group decided to search for alternative approaches to work with Travellers based on the principle of self-determination and on the premise that no lasting progress could be made unless Travellers themselves were involved in all stages of the process.

Some members of the group had previously worked abroad and brought with them a keen awareness of the value of inter-cultural dialogue. The group promoted the view that Travellers are an ethnic group with a right to maintain and develop their distinctive way of life.

This paper will describe and analyse the activities and experience of DTEDG over the past five years. There are three main aspects to this, firstly direct work with Travellers themselves consisting of education, training and community work. Secondly, educational activities with the settled population as well as networking and campaigning. Thirdly, research, publications and policy formulation.

Much of the time, energy and resources were spent on the first of these, especially through organising and running courses for young adult Travellers. Some insights and methods which have been developed in work with oppressed groups in other cultures were adopted and applied (eg. Freire's pedagogy). The main aim of these courses was to develop a critical awareness of Irish society and an analysis of Travellers' situation in order to create the conditions for Travellers to take more control over their lives. As a result of these courses a number of programmes have been set up with Travellers employed as full-time workers such as a youth and community work programme, an enterprise programme and a women's programme.

As the work progressed it became increasingly clear how necessary it was to respond to the situation of widespread prejudice towards, and lack of information about Travellers which existed. This was done by organising adult education courses, conferences and seminars, visiting schools and using the media. Recognition and acceptance of Travellers' cultural identity was promoted and efforts were made to break down barriers of suspicion and fear.

The third area involving publications, research and policy development has not received the attention it requires. This is due to lack of finance, resources and staffing. However some progress has been made and in the coming year it is hoped to develop this further.

Finally the paper will outline the group's hopes and plans for the future in the light of an evaluation of all the activities to date.

Prior to the establishment of DTEDG individual members were involved with Travellers as social workers, community workers, youth workers, religious and academics. A few had been involved for up to ten years while others were only beginning to take an active interest. With 25% of all Irish Travellers living in the greater Dublin area, mostly in deplorable living circumstances, with outbreaks of threats and protests against Travellers by local residents we were challenged to respond. We consulted Travellers about the situation and

attended meetings organised by the National Council for Travelling People. We had close links with a small Travellers organisation called Minceir Misli which was very critical of the settled people who acted as their representatives. They felt, and we agreed, that many settled people were working "for" rather than "with" Travellers. We also felt that there was a reluctance to transfer power to Travellers, that there was an ambivalence about Travellers' identity and culture and that there was a presumption of consensus between state, church , and private sector, voluntary agencies and Travellers. The various responses to the anti-Traveller protests did not provide any evidence for this and the assumption of consensus was challenged, particularly by Travellers themselves, at meetings and on the media.

We were also critical of the central project of the state and voluntary sector which had been to settle and assimilate Travellers because we felt it was a form of cultural annihilation. As we saw it all policies in relation to schooling, training,accommodation and social welfare were ultimately in line with that project of assimilation. However, despite this, in individual cases some excellent work with Travellers was being undertaken but this lacked widespread support or coherence. By and large since Irish society saw itself as being monocultural and settled (i.e. non-nomadic) it could only accommodate policies based on these assumptions.

Within this context we began to examine and analyse the existing approaches to work with Travellers and the philosophies underlying them. We felt it was important to clarify ideas and perceptions about Travellers, both our own and those of other people. Based on written and spoken statements about Travellers and from examining the actual work being done we were able to identify a set of perceptions and images which are summarized in the following statements:

(a) "Travellers are the same as everybody else"

When this is said to point out that Travellers, as equal citizens, have needs and rights like everybody else obviously then it reflects a positive attitude towards Travellers.

However more often than not it infers that that Travellers do not have a distinctive identity or culture of their own. Travellers are expected to conform to the values, lifestyle and norms of the majority population and when they do not they are viewed as a problem. When Travellers are perceived in this way then whenever they do not live up to the expectations of settled people they

2

are seen as failures or a social nuisance. People who operate from this perception start off with a positive and liberal attitude towards Travellers but when Travellers turn out to be different from their expectations they tend to end up disillusioned and reactionary.

(b) "Travellers are social misfits and deviants"

This view arises from an analysis of society which views individuals and groups who deviate from mainstream society as the problem. Mainstream society is assumed to be healthy and fair and Travellers themselves are either blamed for their situation of marginalization and discrimination or viewed as "victims" in need of charity. Insofar as Travellers are given a history they are assumed to have originated from the Cromwellian evictions in the 17th century or from the Great Hunger in the 19th century. They are also seen as drop-outs and misfits who because of personal inadequacy or vice are unable to function adequately in society. The nomadism of Travellers is then viewed as vagrancy. Associated with this are negative stereotypes of Travellers which can develop into racism. A left-wing variation on this interpretation is to view Travellers as the lumpen-proletariate. Some otherwise progressive people who adopt this view are inclined to judge efforts which promote the ethnic identity of Travellers as divisive.

Rehabilitation and assimilation become the main aim of people working with Travellers from this social pathology perspective. A more informed understanding of Travellers will have to acknowledge that they do not fit the stereotypes and that their history is far more ancient with written references as far back as the 12th century. Furthermore the existence of a Travellers' language, called cant, distinct from Irish and Romani, as part of a separate culture, challenges the equation of all Travellers with social drop-outs.

(c) "Travellers have a sub-culture of poverty "

This perception accepts that Travellers have values and a way of life which can be described as a sub-culture but that it persists only because of poverty and marginalization. Removal of poverty is then seen as the solution necessary in order to integrate Travellers into mainstream society. The resilience and dynamism of Travellers' way of life down through the centuries challenges this view. Furthermore not all Travellers who have retained their sense of identity and traditions are poor and in fact some of the wealthiest Travellers show the least inclination towards settlement or integration. Likewise it is

simplistic to conclude that Travellers' culture is merely a residue of past poverty and the sub-culture of poverty theory is inadequate for explaining Travellers' language, nomadism and dynamism.

(d) "Envy those colourful Travellers wandering the rainbows of Ireland"

This can be described as the romantic view which sees Travellers as exotic nomads who come from some idyllic and carefree past. At its most simplistic this perspective presents all Travellers as having innate positive qualities e.g. brilliant musicians, resilient to wet and cold weather. People who subscribe to some version of this tend to seek out " the real " or " genuine " Traveller and to make distinctions between these and other Travellers. They are also inclined to be patronising in their dealings with Travellers and this makes it virtually impossible to relate as equals who can mutually challenge as well as support each other.

The problem with this interpretation becomes evident from an examination of the harsh living circumstances of Irish Travellers, or from the research which shows the high infant mortality rates, the frequent hospitalization of children and the low life expectancy of Travellers.

(c) " Travellers are an ethnic group "

This view is based on the notion that Travellers can be considered an ethnic group because they regard themselves and are regarded by others as a distinct community by virtue of the following characteristics:

— they have a long shared history which, even though largely unresearched, can be traced back for centuries;

— they have their own values, customs, lifestyle and traditions associated with nomadism;

— they come from a small number of ancestors and different families are associated with different parts of the country, one becomes a Traveller not just by choice but by birth;

— they have their own language called Cant, Gammon or Shelta and are also recognizable by their accents and use of language;

— they have an oral tradition rich in folklore and also have a distinctive style of singing;

— the majority adhere to a form of popular religiosity in the catholic tradition;

— they are a small minority group (approx 0.5% of the total population) who have a common experience of oppression and discrimination down through the years.

People only become aware of ethnicity when different ways of living, organising, working and relating, i.e. different cultures, come into contact with each other.

"Ethnicity is a subjective experience of what you are in relationship to being part of a group... It follows from that, that, ethnicity isn't the property of an individual, it is partly a sense of collective identity. Ethnicity is not a fixed property of people. So Travellers' ethnicity doesn't mean that every day of their lives and everything they do, they should go about proclaiming that they are Travellers and must behave like that. In invoking their own identity and asserting that they are an ethnic group Travellers don't have to prove it 24 hours of the day ".
(Dr. Charles Husband, lecture on Racism and Ethnicity, Dublin 1989)

This perception of Travellers as an ethnic group was supported by some anthropologists and a small minority involved with Travellers. It was not sufficiently accepted to influence policies on the overall direction of work with Travellers. In the "Report of the Travelling People Review Body" published by the government in 1983 it stated that while there had..... *"been some academic debate on the question whether Travellers comprise a distinct culture, an ethnic group or sub-culture and , particularly, a sub-culture of poverty"* there was no agreement among researchers *"as to the origins of Travellers or their status as a group"*. The report stated that it was not within the terms of reference of the government Review Body to resolve the issue. The task of the Review Body was *"to review current policies and services for the Travelling People and to make recommendations to improve the existing situation"*.

What this position assumes, wrongly in our view, is that the question of identity is an academic one with little relevance for the concrete situation. It also presumes that, regardless of the answer to that question, settled people know what constitutes an improvement for Travellers.

These were the main perceptions we identified and when we formally established the DTEDG in 1985 we acknowledged Travellers as an ethnic group. We decided that any work with Travellers should support their right to retain and develop their identity. We hoped to avoid and learn from the main mistakes which we felt had been made by some voluntary and statutory organisations whose underlying philosophy inevitably led to paternalistic relations of dependency. We wanted to challenge the widespread racism, prejudice and discrimination towards Travellers. We also wanted to offer our skills in the support of Travellers in their struggle for justice and acceptance in Irish society.

In order to make our dream come true we formed alliances with other groups and individuals who had a similar philosophy or were searching for new approaches. We decided to apply community work principles and methods in order to achieve our objectives. This meant undertaking an ongoing analysis of Travellers' living circumstances and marginal status in order to take collective action based on that. It also meant that Travellers themselves would have to be consulted and actively involved in all stages of the process in order to promote autonomy and self-reliance.

We felt that a pre-requisite for this was education, consciousness raising and organisation, first of all with Travellers and secondly with the general public. We were aware of the inadequacy of the existing schooling system in responding to Travellers' needs. In 1984 over 60% of Traveller children in the 3 - 5 age group were unable to avail of pre-school education, 50% of children in the 6 -12 age group did not attend school at all and of those who did, attendance was often irregular. An estimated 90% of children over the age of 12 had stopped going to school. There were 23 training centres set up especially for Travellers and these catered mainly for teenagers (16 - 19 year olds). Trainees attending these centres were in receipt of allowances and the state agency which funded them placed heavy emphasis on training for employment.

In the context of structural unemployment, widespread discrimination towards Travellers and Travellers' own antipathy towards conventional 9 - 5 jobs, it was very difficult for these centres to fulfil the state's expectations and at the same time contribute to the promotion of the Travellers' cause. The vast majority of adult Travellers were illiterate and operated on the fringe of Irish society.

6

Given the fact that the Irish schooling system is unable to cater adequately for the needs of most working class pupils it is not surprising that Travellers fare even worse in the education process. In addition to this, Dublin county has a noticeably low rate of admission (20%) to higher education in comparison with the counties with the highest rate of admission (35%). Research confirms that the lower socio-economic groupings are very under-represented in higher education. The most seriously under-represented social group, apart from Travellers, is that of unskilled manual workers. Only 1.8% of new entrants were from this social group compared with 12% from the much smaller higher professional group.

In response to this situation and in close consultation with Travellers we designed a 6 month full-time course for young adult Travellers. After lengthy negotiations the course was approved and funded by the government industrial training authority as a pilot project. Funding covered a fulltime co-ordinator and assistant, allowances for 24 trainees, (male and female, married and single) and a grant to cover running costs. Participants were selected after initial informal discussions and an interview. They ranged in age from 17 to 33 with the majority in the 17 - 20 age group. The majority had a poor record of school attendance and the illiteracy rate was high.

The course was held in a city centre premises and this was important because it facilitated interaction between groups and families of Travellers who rarely mixed. The course process was largely experimental supplemented with talks, group discussions and the regular use of audio-visual resources. Through the use of problem-posing exercises participants were challenged to develop critical and creative thinking. The course content was very varied and comprehensive, covering such topics as Irish society, Travellers history, culture and current situation, personal and group development, introduction to youth and community work, literacy skills and general knowledge. It also included skills training in photography, graphics, drama, newsletter and magazine production. During the course there were field-trips and placements with a wide range of community based groups and other agencies. The course was monitored carefully throughout and evaluated regularly by the staff and management. Outside consultants, which included an older Traveller, were involved in this process.

Efforts were made throughout to promote a positive sense of Traveller identity within the group. The fact that the course was flexible and that staff were able to adjust the curriculum in accordance with the needs of the group was a crucial factor in its success.

At the end of the course one member was accepted as a mature student in a third level institute on a 2 year community work course. The majority of the others were accepted on a 1 year "Teamwork" programme sponsored by DTEDG and funded by the state. The follow - up programme included inservice training/ education as well as youth and community work activities. When one member of the group was awarded the Young Citizen of the Year award and subsequently made a successful appearance on the most popular T.V. chat show, the whole Traveller community took pride in his achievements.

DTEDG then organised another course similar to the first for another group. This was followed by two further Teamwork programmes. Through their involvement in these courses, work programmes and other activities a number of young adult Travellers were in a position to take up work positions with their own people. DTEDG applied to the state agencies for funding and eventually got approval to undertake a youth work programme and a community work programme employing three Travellers. One of these had just successfully completed the two year professional course referred to earlier.

One of the challenges faced by DTEDG during this time was the fact that most Travellers were dependent on Social Welfare for survival. Given the reality of one of the worst unemployment rates in Europe (approx. 19%), high emigration and widespread prejudice towards Travellers it was very difficult to address this issue in any meaningful way.

On the basis of the developmental programmes already completed DTEDG secured state funding for an Enterprise Development worker. The enterprise worker began to explore the possibility of Travellers developing new income generating activities. The aim was not just to start a business but to develop a culturally appropriate and economically viable enterprise which would have a community development dimension built into it.

What has emerged from this is a new Travellers Resource Warehouse which recycles industrial waste. The project gives employment to three young Travellers who run it as a co-operative. Even though it is still struggling to become firmly established it caught the public imagination especially when it won first prize in a prestigious environmental competition in March of this year.

around the country from February to June this year. After each performance there was a workshop which enabled the audience and actors to explore the issues in the play particularly those in relation to bi-culturalism.

The third area where DTEDG hoped to make an impact was in the area of research, policy formulation and publications. Much of the work in this area still remains to be done because the other two areas absorbed most of the time and resources. A further reason why we have been unable to give sufficient attention to this has been our insecurity of tenure. Since it's foundation up to the present DTEDG has been renting city centre premises. This has resulted in insecurity because the group had to move on a number of occasions. In order to resolve this difficulty we have embarked on a large fund-raising campaign to purchase our own premises. We recently acquired a suitable building which we hope to have refurbished by the end of this year. The fund-raising campaign and the effort to consolidate the organisation absorbed a lot of staff and management time and energy.

However one of the priorities for the next three years will be to carry out research based on our work and experience to date. This has already begun with research on the special arrangements for Travellers in receipt of social welfare benefits. Other areas being considered for investigation are:Travellers in care and who have left care, Travellers and imprisonment; the effect of sedentarization on Travellers, and a profile of Travellers in the greater Dublin area. Work will also be continued on anti-discrimination and anti-racist legislation. With regard to policy development it is proposed to write up an overall statement on education, training, accommodation, youth work and community development.

At present a sub-group is preparing a number of publications eg. "Traveller Women Getting Involved"; D.T.E.D.G. - five year report; an information pack for schools and local groups, a reader on issues of concern related to Travellers. There are also plans to produce programmes for radio with a focus on Travellers and a video on the work is near completion.

In reviewing the work of DTEDG one of the factors that has contributed to the success so far has been that the full-time staff and volunteer management have developed a coherent philosophy based on ongoing evaluation. Therefore there is no conflict of interest between staff and management. The fact that there are Travellers on staff and management is another positive aspect although it poses a constant challenge to transfer power and responsibility from settled people to Travellers. The availability of professionally trained

personnel with a wide range of expertise and training on staff and management has made it possible to undertake innovative and creative approaches which would not otherwise be possible. This includes the ability to negotiate and gain the confidence of funders. But as well as possessing skills, some members of management and staff have been prepared to commit themselves to long hours of work often at week-ends.

The fact that the group started out, not from an individual case-work or a welfare model, but from a collective approach has been very important in terms of image and Travellers' expectations.

The course and training modules would not have succeeded were it not for the fact that they were specifically designed and were sufficiently flexible to cater for the needs of the participants.

The employment of Travellers as staff members has been possible because the people in question have already completed courses and training but also work as partners in a team where they receive ongoing support and supervision. In this way we try to avoid tokenism. This raises the question of an exclusively Travellers' organisation. DTEDG supports this notion in principle and actively promotes it by structuring Travellers' sessions into the different courses. We have also supported Travellers in achieving an All-Travellers' meeting at National Council meetings in the face of much resistance. The rationale for such All-Travellers' meetings is neither separatism nor division but autonomy and self-determination.

There are however still difficulties with such meetings. First of all there is the reality of fragmentation and division among Travellers themselves. Secondly, there is the problem that most Travellers are still dependent upon settled people in order to attend such meetings. Thirdly there is the need for Travellers to develop such meetings in ways which suit Travellers' culture and the different levels of awareness among participants. Finally, given the reality that Travellers constitute such a small minority within the total population it is important that Travellers form alliances with settled people who are in solidarity with them.

Links with women's groups have already been referred to. Links are also being made with trade unions in order to achieve this solidarity. Another recent attempt to build links is through the examination of the role of religion in Travellers' culture. We began to explore this issue last year and held a seminar

on the topic. This year we have continued this exploration and are presently preparing for a national pilgrimage in solidarity with Travellers. Small groups of Travellers and settled people have been meeting to prepare for this event. The aim is to use this traditional form of popular religion in Travellers' culture to focus on the situation of Travellers. It is an attempt to reflect on nomadism by involving the symbolism involved in a pilgrimage. It is also an attempt to develop solidarity among Travellers themselves and between Travellers and settled people.

We feel that this is particularly important at this time when there are increasing restrictions on nomadism and increasing sedentarization in the urban context. It is in the context of these developments that we must examine indications that Travellers' culture may be going through a crisis. Some of the manifestations of this are seen in the internal feuding among Traveller families, antisocial and criminal activity, tensions between older and younger Travellers and abuse of alcohol. It is in the context of responding to this that the efforts to build solidarity are taking place.

As a voluntary organisation DTEDG is faced with the ongoing challenge of obtaining funds for programmes. While support from the state has been forthcoming this has been short-term in nature without long-term guarantees. As well as creating insecurity this makes planning more difficult. Despite the difficulties the organisation is growing in strength and credibility. We are eager to develop links with groups in Europe involved in work with Travellers in order to share our experience and to learn from what is happening in different countries. We believe that there is much in common despite all the variations from country to country.

Hopefully this paper, by sharing some of our experience, will contribute to that process of exchanging ideas and information and offering mutual support.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bewley, V. (Ed)., 1974. *Travelling People*, Dublin Veritas.

Barry, J. & Daly, L., 1988. *The Travellers Health Status Study*, Dublin, The Health Board.

Clancy, Patrick, 1988. *Who goes to college?* A second national survey of participation in higher education, Dublin. Higher Education Authority.

Clancy, P. et al (Eds), 1986. *Ireland a Sociological Profile*, Dublin, Institute of Public Administration.

Committee of Inquiry into the Rise of Fascism and Racism in Europe, Dec. 1985. *Report on the findings of the inquiry*, European Parliament.

Fogarty, M. et al, 1984. *Irish Values and Attitudes: The Irish Report of the European Value Systems Study*, Dublin, Dominican Publications.

Gmelch, George, 1977. *The Irish Tinkers: The urbanization of an Itinerant People*, California, Cummings Publishing Co.

Liegeois, Jean-Pierre, 1987. *Gypsies and Travellers*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe.

Mac Alister, R.A.S., 1976, *The Secret Languages of Ireland*, Amsterdam APA-Philo Press

Okely, Judith, 1983. *The Traveller Gypsies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

O'Connell, J. et al, 1987. *Travellers Getting Involved*, Dublin, D.T.E.D.G.

Peillon, Michel, 1982. *Contemporary Irish Society: An Introduction*, Dublin, Gill & MacMillian.

Sibley, David, 1981. *Outsiders in Urban Society*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

The Travelling People Review Body Report, 1983. Dublin, Stationary Office.

The Need for Imagination in work with Irish Travellers

by John O'Connell

When I reflect on my involvement with Travellers through the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group one of the most striking and persistent features that keeps recurring is the importance of travelling itself. On the one hand this may seem very obvious given the name, Travellers, but on the other hand it is surprising. It is surprising given the fact that travelling is so restricted and that so many Travellers are now in houses or permanent halting sites. It is also surprising given that the official state policy since the early 60s has been to settle Travellers. *"It is not considered that there is any alternative to a positive drive for housing itinerants if a permanent solution to the problem of itinerancy, based on absorption and integration, is to be found"*. (Government Commission on Itinerancy 1963, p. 62)

The statutory sector was fully supported by the voluntary sector in this project and accepted the state's definition of the problem. That understanding of *'the problem of itinerancy'* has dominated work with Travellers down through the years to such an extent that it is still very widespread among the majority population.

When the founding members of the D.T.E.D.G. began to meet to discuss the situation of Travellers in 1983 and 1984 we were unhappy with that definition of the problem and the 'solutions' which flowed from it. These solutions consisted primarily of efforts to settle Travellers and to facilitate their integration into mainstream society. Social workers and teachers were seen as the key professionals needed for that task. Social workers were employed by the state to ensure that Travellers adjusted to their new circumstances. They were also expected to handle individual problem cases associated with alcoholism, family break up, neglect of children and so on.

Teachers, likewise, were expected to play a crucial role in the settlement process by ensuring that Travellers got the benefits of schooling and adjusted to the demands of the classroom.

In 1983 when the second commission on Travellers published its report it rejected the concept of 'absorption' replacing it with 'integration'. It also abandoned the term itinerant and replaced it with Traveller. It was more liberal in tone than the 1963 report. This liberalism was manifested in the manner in which it stressed individual decision making and avoided the possibility of a collective response. For example, 'the extent to which they (Travellers) will integrate with the settled community will depend on individual decisions by them and not on decisions by Travellers as a whole or any grouping of them'.

This contributes to the piecemeal approach to policy making which exists. It ignores the possibility of Travellers being provided with the necessary information about schooling and accommodation which would enable them to make informed choices based on a common understanding of how they could safeguard their identity and lifestyle.

From our perspective and experience we saw that Travellers resisted settlement and also resisted schooling. Their living circumstances were on the whole appalling. The benefits from schooling were in our view minimal. The vast majority of adult Travellers were illiterate. In trying to develop a response to this situation we felt that a community work approach was needed in order to promote a collective response to issues. We also saw the need for an alternative form of education and training from that being provided. In particular we saw the urgency to cater for the needs of the older Travellers as well as the out of school youth.

Another feature which characterised the early 80s and had a major impact on the formation of the D.T.E.D.G. was the emergence of mobs of settled people intent on evicting Travellers from their encampment. In this very hostile context some Travellers emerged as articulate spokespersons and made a big impact on the media because they spoke with passion and conviction. However it is relatively easy to be articulate and to speak with passion about one's own circumstances, especially when forced to do so in order to protect oneself. It requires a different level of political awareness to speak with equal passion and conviction about the plight of others. We felt that we could offer a service in facilitating Travellers to develop that awareness as well as supporting those who were speaking out. It was a challenge to move from the level of the personal anecdote to the level of a more coherent analysis which took on board the oppression of others. In order to achieve this we began to organise education courses.

Central to these courses was a validation of Traveller identity and culture, the promotion of a deeper understanding of Traveller's history and current situation. It was in this context that personal development, i.e. improving individual self-esteem and confidence took place. Efforts were also made to develop an ability to critically analyse the root causes of poverty, inequality and discrimination in society by examining class, race and gender issues. As well as a focus on increasing the knowledge of the participants there was a strong emphasis on developing basic community work and youth work skills in order to overcome depending on settled people.

In the process of carrying out educational work with Travellers, based mainly on an experimental process, and from our contact with others involved in this area, we became more aware of the various approaches and assumptions about Travellers underlying these. We identified a number of prevailing perceptions of Travellers which were evident in what people said and wrote but more importantly through what they did in practice. These perceptions ranged from seeing Travellers as misfits, vagrants, deviants, lumpen proletariat, sub-culture of poverty, an oppressed minority, an ethnic group to even idealised notions of Travellers as exotic nomads.

In our group we took as our starting point that Travellers had a distinct cultural identity and shared a long history which marked them off from the majority population. Because of these and other characteristics we concluded that Travellers consisted an ethnic group whose culture was under assault because of a refusal to acknowledge their right to live out their way of life. In particular this refusal to acknowledge Traveller's rights was evident in the state's and indeed majority population's response to nomadism.

This takes me back to the point I raised at the outset of this paper, i.e. the importance of travelling in the lives of Travellers. Despite, all the efforts of the majority population to deny the existence of a Traveller culture, Travellers have managed to retain a distinct identity. This distinct identity is closely associated with travelling.

Despite the combined effort of the statutory and voluntary sectors to equate travelling or nomadism with vagrancy, thereby criminalising it, Travellers still pack up and move on. Despite the restrictions on travelling by frequent police stoppages and investigations, lack of adequate stopping places resulting from road development, new housing estates and most of all huge boulders to prevent parking, many Travellers refuse to conform to a sedentary

lifestyle. This causes a lot of frustration to local authorities, residents associations, Traveller's settlement committees, social workers and teachers. This frustration is inevitable as long as we continue to define the problem as the 'failure' of Travellers to conform or 'their inability to live in houses'. The challenge which this poses, is whether a predominantly sedentary society can find imaginative ways of accepting the existence of a nomadic or semi nomadic minority. In effect it highlights the challenge of whether Irish society can become intercultural. Or to put it in terms of implications of this, it means that instead of forcing Traveller children to adapt to schools as they are at present there is a need to adjust the mainstream schooling system so that it can cater for Travellers. Instead of trying to prepare or 'educate' Travellers for conventional housing we need to develop an imaginative, humane and acceptable standard of accommodation which is consistent with a semi-nomadic lifestyle. Is this realistic? Is travelling or nomadism an aberration in contemporary society? In an attempt to explore these questions I began to read about other nomadic groups. What follows is just a random selection of some of the things I found.

In Nazi Germany the hostility towards the Jews and Gypsies was rationalised on the basis that these groups had wandering in their genes and could find no place in a stable Reich. Nomadism was seen as a from of neurosis which had to be suppressed in the interests of Western civilisation. However, in the East there is a very different set of traditions which views travelling as a way of re-establishing the original harmony which once existed between humans and the universe:-

— *You cannot travel on the path before you become the path itself.*

(Guatama Buddha)

— *Life is a bridge, cross over it, but build no house on it.*

(Indian Proverb)

— *There is no happiness for the man who does not travel. Living in a society of men, the best man becomes a sinner. For Indra is the friend of the traveller. Therefore wander.*

(Aitareya Brahmana)

— *Our nature lies in movement, complete calm is death.*

(Pascal, Pensíes)

— *He who does not travel does not know the value of men.*

(Moorish Proverb)

In Islam the action of walking was used as a technique for dissolving the attachments of the world and allowing people to lose themselves in God. The Hadj or sacred journey was a ritual migration to detach men from their sinful homes and re-instate the equality of all men before God. If a pilgrim dies on the Hadj he goes straight, as a martyr, to Heaven.

The Judeo-Christian tradition has numerous references which point to the importance of journey's and travelling. The tensions between a sedentary and nomadic lifestyle are contained in the biblical story of Cain and Abel. Cain was a settled farmer and Abel was a keeper of sheep. Cain killed Abel and has to make atonement by becoming a fugitive and a wanderer.

In this tradition also Yahweh is a 'God of the Way'. His sanctuary is a mobile ark and his dwelling a tent. He leads the Israelites out of Egypt away from the fleshpots and slavery on a journey. They celebrate the Passover in haste with shodden feet and sticks in hand to remind them of their journeying. He brings them to the promised land but settlement is always ambivalent. The prophet Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Hosea were nomadic revivalists who hurled abuse at the decadence of sedentary civilisation. They looked to the Day of Restoration when the Jews would return to the frugal asceticism of nomadic life. Jeremiah reminded the Israelites of the Rechabites, the tribe which resisted settlement. *"Build no home and sow no seed; neither plant nor own a vineyard. You shall dwell in tents all your life, so that you may live long on the earth where you are wayfarers"*. (Jeremiah 35:7)

The pilgrimage is another ritual with a long history in the Christian tradition which keeps alive the symbol of the Way or Journey as part of the human condition and experience.

Bruce Chatwin who studied nomads from Afghanistan to Mauritania wrote: *"All the great teachers have preached that Man, originally was a wanderer in the scorching and barren wilderness of this world — the words are those of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisition — and that to rediscover his humanity, he must slough off attachments and take to the road"*.

In reviewing his notes on nomadism he concluded that *"natural selection has designed us from the structure of our brain cells to the structure of our big toe, for a career of seasonal journeys on foot through a blistering land of thorn scrub or desert."*

Chatwin was fond of comparing fish, animal and bird migrations such as the journeys of the cod, the eel, the herring, the salmon, the wildebeest, the cuckoo, the Arctic tern, the wild goose and so on to the wanderings of humans. He refers to Darwin's Descent of Man which points out that in certain birds the migrating impulse is stronger than the maternal. A mother will abandon her fledglings in the nest rather than miss her appointment for the long journey south. Chatwin also refers to the Norwegian Anthropologist, Fredrik Barth's study of the Basseri, a tribe of Iranian nomads. In the 1930s they were forbidden by Reza Shah to move for the winter grazing. In 1941 the Shah was deposed, and they were free once again to make the three hundred mile journey to the Zagros. But they had no animals because in the meantime their sheep had died. Yet they set off all the same. They became nomads again. "The *Supreme value to them*", wrote Barth, "*lay in the freedom to migrate, not in the circumstances that made it economically viable*".

In "The Songlines" Chatwin describes the invisible pathways connecting up all over Australia which Aborigines ritually travelled in the course of their religious duties.

What has all this got to do with Travellers or with the role of schools in relation to Travellers? Well, I think it is relevant in so far as it can open up our minds, and more importantly perhaps, our imaginations to take another look at the notion of nomadism in the lives of Travellers and to see it, not as an aberration, but as a fulfilling and humane form of existence.

Jean Pierre Liegeois is another person who is convinced of the significance of this as is shown in his study of European Travellers and Gypsies. What he says is very illuminating and I think is very important in relation to Irish Travellers.

"*Many find themselves in a house or caravan without wheels, but still have the state of mind of a nomad, as they exist in a precarious situation which they consider provisional, one which may last decades, or throughout a lifetime, or may change rapidly ... Tent, caravan or house: those concerned do not judge each other in terms of type of housing; they know that it is both functional and provisional and frequently precarious and imposed.*"

He points out the many functions of travelling, social, cultural and economic. But most important travelling is associated with identity.

Integration and Interculturalism: Some Issues

by Mairin Kenny

Integration is a buzz word in education nowadays. Miriam Fitzsimons, during her period as National Co-ordinator, observed that in responding to the right of Travellers to integration in mainstream classes, we are slipping towards a situation where "*the more the integration, the less the Traveller*" (IATSE '90): isn't this absorption, and is that really what parents want? It is essential that we clarify our thinking on the issues involved. In this paper, I will take up some aspects of the debate:

— how Travellers see integration;
— integration and history of Traveller education;
— levels at which the issue must be addressed;
— the need for a new perspective;
— troubles in the classroom;
— intercultural curriculum and Travellers.

(I must preface this paper with a few remarks. As members of the ATTP, we have heard the arguments for according the status of an ethnic group to Travellers [O'Connell, 1989] and I take this as given: those who may still be dubious might also agree once the whole area of curriculum is opened up later. Given the ethnic status of Gypsies and Travellers, sedentary society's discrimination against them on the basis of their identity warrants the title racism [racism being the combination of prejudice and power]. Finally, I speak of "sedentary" people, not "settled" people throughout: the word "settled" has overtones of moral superiority — as in settled down, settled up, settled = undisturbed.)

Traveller parents want at least the option of integration (the following are extracts from interviews conducted during my research):
"*If I had a child I'd take it out rather than let it into a special class... I wouldn't mind a special class for slow learners... Are there special classes for the country children? (Q: ...What about schools for the all Irish speakers, ...for the rich...?) Yes but... there the special class is only for the knackers, the ones that don't know how to work... it's god help you you're not able... it's putting down the Traveller really... But the*

body-count is still the main indicator used to measure success in Traveller schooling. Now attendance levels in at least some areas are excellent. At level two — structure — we are moving from the special class model to the support one, and championing the right to integration. But we know well that purely locational integration is often in fact a delusion.

These two levels of participation and structure are important, but I suggest that the context for effective operation lies in the curriculum, and therefore cultural integration is crucial. The culture sometimes does get symbolic mention — for instance in the video prepared by the Department for pre-and in-service teacher training — but not sufficient study (as was the case in the Review Body Report). In this area we need to look abroad. Compared for instance to England, we are profoundly monocultural. We have avoided mistakes in this area because we have done nothing, but we should learn: in England "multiculturalism" used to mean that there was the norm (sedentary indigenous people) and other exotic groups to which the norm reached out. Adoption of the word "interculturalism" indicates a shift in attitude to one which holds that there are no norms in this sense — rather, all are members of ethnic groups and have a right to cultural inclusion in the curriculum. This applies of course to Gypsies/Travellers, and in research and practice in intercultural education a lot of interesting work is being done with them.

The task of developing an intercultural curriculum could be compared to that demanded in recognising and including women in the "world". At first it seemed sufficient to accord them a place in the already-constructed world order; but it emerged that there was a whole realm of knowledge, history, tradition, skills, that belonged to women and it was not enough to leave that outside the door. We realised that the history, the order, which we thought was neutral/natural, was male: everything has to be rethought to include both. Another comparison would be with the educational task as it emerged at the start of Ireland's process of achieving independence. Our culture was given high priority in education — language, dance, sports, history. All sorts of things were brought in — often regressively or rigidly, as evidenced in the way we went about reviving Irish — but there was always a compulsion to create a sense of identity that was in some way visionary: we did not just set out to make our people as skilled as any other people, but also to enable them to proclaim their Irishness. This same task awaits the Travellers — to develop a vision of themselves — and we have a duty as educators to provide them with a space wherein to do this. This has profound implications for integra-

tion, and to take these on board, we teachers (sedentary people) must strive to understand that the nomadic way of life is not just some minor deviance, that it is profoundly different.

To turn to what we ourselves must do: we have to try to understand what it means to be a nomad in Europe. (I base a lot of the following on the work of Jean Pierre Liegeois.) What does nomadism mean for these people, and for the sedentary populations among whom they live? To be a nomad in Europe is primarily a state of mind. To live in a caravan, in a house, or in a tent is a strategic option: the choice can be adhered to for years or things can change rapidly, depending on social or economic conditions. At any moment journeying may begin again, voluntarily or under pressure of hostile events. In economic terms, nomadism in Europe is service-based: voluntary movement is in response to the pull of the market, as opposed to the seasonal movements of pastoral nomads. It could be said that this latter form — often romanticised and always safely "foreign" — is nomadism as generally understood and approved of by the sedentary population. However, it seems that all forms of nomadism are viewed as implicitly inferior in, for instance, our teaching about early or pre-historic times. Our presentation is ethnocentric. In very simplistic and brief terms, our teaching goes as follows: originally society was nomadic, until discovery of crops meant people didn't have to travel: settlement enabled the further development of agriculture and led to surpluses; that enabled development of specialist classes and cities; that in turn led to high culture. Bruce Chatwin (1987) would however say that one section settled, one remained nomadic, but that both developed surpluses, high culture and wisdom and traditions.

However the sedentary section gained political dominance. We then took over the nomadic traditions and ignored their nomadic character. An obvious example is the Bible. The Old Testament is the book of a nomadic people. God continually calls His people back to the nomadic way, every time they become fat and corrupted, or enslaved where they settled. To quote from Chatwin: *"Yahweh in origin is a God of the way, his sanctuary is a mobile ark, his house a tent, his altar a cairn of rough stone, and though he may promise his children a well-watered land as blue and green as the Bedouin's favourite colours, he secretly desires for them the desert"*. We all interpret God's call to plenty. It was not. Milk and wild honey are what the desert nomad has when all else fails: milk from their goats and wild honey on the scarce desert plants.

We need to remind ourselves often that it is not natural and normal to be either sedentary or nomadic — both are constructed ways of life. Again Chatwin suggests that we should consider why one of the best ways to pacify a baby is to walk up and down with it: this he feels indicates a deep genetic orientation to movement. In modern spiritual wisdom, to go on a journey is a key image for making a new start in life, for progressing. We have all this imagery built into our language and we ignore it. We teachers have to do a lot of work on our own mindsets about nomadism versus sedentarism. Hence the significance of that word sedentary. We must work on our own thinking if we want to incorporate Traveller culture into the curriculum.

When we come to incorporate all this into the curriculum, our task is to give honourable mention to nomadism, to give space for celebration. It is not a case of insisting that Traveller children draw trailers, or of demanding that the Traveller child in the classroom be able to talk about how bread was cooked on an open fire. A lot of them may no longer know about or have any contact with their traditional skills: they both no longer need them, and they have been deprived of them.

We have to move back from the model of Travellers that has unconsciously shaped our work for so long: the fact that we have underestimated the task does indicate that we operate out of some model of Travellers other than the ethnic one: rather, we are operating out of something about them being inadequate or like ourselves if they got the chance. To say the Travellers are a nomadic ethnic group with the right to travel if they so wish is not to say they must move, or that the current appalling situation of mobile Travellers is "ethnic" and fine; nor is it to say that Travellers can move around fecklessly and aimlessly and still get proper education for their children. It is just to accord to this group their right to cultural space within which they can work out their identity and within which to actively make choices, individually, as families, or collectively. Unless they can take pride in that cultural space the choices will be damaged. Freire would say that a people without a history have no future, no sense of identity from which to act. We must give the Travellers space to express their culture. It is not our job to tell them what it is, to rush off to summer schools to learn Gammon so that we can teach it in the classroom. It is our job to give the nomadic way of life honourable mention.

To move to troubles in the classroom. These are the secret bugbears of some teachers of Travellers, what they mean when they talk about social readiness. Not every child engages in this trouble-making behaviour, nor does it nec-

essarily happen often, but what does happen within disturbances is, I believe very important. I will briefly comment on a row which broke out in a classroom during my fieldwork for my research. It was ten minutes long, and in it the children were protesting about not being let out to play (it was raining). On the surface they appeared to be totally out of control, but on study of the sequence of images and arguments it emerged that they had engaged on a powerful piece of work. They reversed the power relationship between Traveller and sedentary officials, arraigning the teacher in the dock as if for trial, portraying themselves as victims and teacher as oppressor (thus putting the teacher in the very role we all reject in sedentary-Traveller relations — we like to see ourselves as liberators). Victimage was used by these children as a strategic tactic, perhaps because it is a great way to get us on the guilt train. However, there is more to it: this victim-presentation was the main one the children called on, even in ongoing positive classroom interactions. For instance, during talk in RE about the Feast of Tabernacles, stories about evictions spilled out: in my year's fieldwork in the classroom I heard little or no positive talk, nor do I in my own classroom. The positive I do hear is mainly around areas such as fighting (boys), though they do talk positively also about hunting; girls have in my experience less positive talk.

In conclusion about troubles: these can be the product of interactions between specific teacher and child, or of particular current school-home relations: we must constantly examine these areas. However I believe there is another factor at work: generations of racist exclusion have damaged the very ground of relations between the two cultures. For this reason, I would suggest that the introduction of cultural space will contribute to the lessening of these troubles and to their appropriate handling when they do occur — because this space-making helps us teachers as much as it helps the children to acquire a breadth of vision, and the healed relations that brings.

In our teaching programmes we must include two approaches to intercultural issues — the disturbed and the celebratory. To illustrate the two and the difference between them, I will outline some examples of materials and activities which we could use or develop.

In the intercultural materials published in England, trailers, for instance, are included as a matter of course in illustrations in readers, alphabet and story books: this enables inclusion, as part of the normal, of the Traveller child's experience. However, there is a drawback in this model for inclusion of Travellers: it does not easily allow for celebration of their culture. For that we

need books and activities specifically about Travellers, but there is very little other than books of the social studies type available. These should be used, and supplemented.

In the area of community development and adult pastoral care there are some indicators of what is possible: I would refer to the pilgrimages to Ma Meam, and to Tobar an Ailt, as examples of this celebration. Such events generate a pride in Traveller traditions, whether or not these are still being lived out by the ones on pilgrimage. In particular I find the symbols adopted for these pilgrimages interesting, and I think we as teachers should think imaginatively about symbols and stories as ways of developing pride. In Bray we in St. Kieran's School for Travellers were included in an interschool carol concert last Christmas, for which we produced a frieze on Europe's nomads: in it we included names of other Gypsy/Traveller groups, and images of the fire, the wheel, and of course the horse. This gave opportunity to the Traveller child to be proud, and to the sedentary child to find a new way of seeing Travellers. In the classroom it gave us a starting point for talking about what it meant to be a Traveller — which all agreed had nothing to do with what they lived in — and for learning about other nomadic groups in Europe with which travellers could have a sense of solidarity. In this way, cultural celebration can and should be engaged in occasionally in the classroom, whether Travellers are present or not. The RE programme as developed by the Parish Team for Travellers in Dublin also contains some material which could be worked on and included in RE for all children. And the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group is currently working on a kit for use in schools.

To conclude: I would make a plea for an analytical and visionary approach to Travellers in our practice, on three grounds: it liberates teachers, nomadic pupils, and sedentary pupils. For the nomadic pupils first of all: Traveller children are entitled to an empowering education — an experience which will enlarge their vision of themselves, enable them to celebrate their culture and their world, and release their creativity. This empowerment of the soul, of the imagination, is an integral part of what schools try to offer in a culturally accessible way to all children, and is, to those of us (all of us?) who believe in humanistic education, a crucial part of our task. For the sedentary pupil, it opens up a new way of seeing the world, and offers them a rich alternative to racist beliefs. For the teacher, this large framework gives space for creative work with nomadic pupils, and thereby frees the teacher from a sedentarised, problem-based approach to work in the areas where any of these children need additional support. We must break free of sedentarised limits in our

approach to nomadic children. The general invisibility/voicelessness, or — at the best — problem status of this group in our curriculum indicates that we have a lot to do.

References:

Liegeois, Jean Pierre, (1987a): *School Provision for Gypsy and Traveller Children: A Synthesis Report*. Commission of European Communities, Luxembourg.

Liegeois, Jean Pierre, (1987b): *Gypsies and Travellers, A Sociological History*. Council for Cultural Co-operation, Strasbourg.

Chatwin, Bruce (1987): *The Songlines*. London: Picador.

Cashmore, E. Ellis (1984): *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

O'Connell, John: *Working with Irish Travellers*.

O'Dwyer, Sr. Colette (1975/78/81/84/88): *Reports on Education and Training of Travellers*. Ireland.

Government: (1963): *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Government: (1983): *Report of the Travelling People Review Body*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Education (1970): *Commission Report on Educational Facilities for the Children of Itinerants*: Oideas, Vol. 5, pp 44-50. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Minorization of Travelling Groups and their cultural rights - the case of the Irish Traveller

by Ronnie Fay

Introduction

This paper attempts to situate and highlight aspects of the current debate about Travellers and ethnicity in Ireland. The first section outlines the historical context to this debate. It examines some of the changes that have occurred in Traveller society over the past thirty years. Statutory responses are discussed as are those of the voluntary groups working in partnership with the state. A focus is then given to independent Traveller responses to change and state policies during this period. The responses of voluntary groups defining themselves in partnership with Travellers are also highlighted.

The second section of the paper examines elements of the present struggle to have a Traveller identity recognised and resourced. It examines the context in which this debate is happening and positive developments that have occurred in the recent past. Developments in legislation and the courts are briefly mentioned to illustrate the changing nature of the debate.

The final section focuses on specific issues about ethnicity and significant events that have taken place in promoting an understanding of ethnicity, both among Travellers and the wider settled community. Some achievements and setbacks are discussed in this section. Links with other Gypsy and European groups are mentioned.

Historical Context

a) Change in Traveller Society:

The past 30 years has witnessed a huge increase in the Traveller population in Ireland. In 1960 the figure was a population of approximately 6,500 whereas in 1987 there were an estimated 20,000 Travellers in Ireland. School attendance has increased dramatically from 112 in 1960 to over 60% attending school in 1984 (despite these numbers attending school there is still a high degree of illiteracy).In 1960 Travellers were predominantly an independent, nomadic

rural people. They had their own trades and crafts such as horse dealing, copper or tin work, chimney sweeps or acting as seasonal labourers. Today, mainly as a result of industrialisation and modernisation many of these crafts are obsolete. Tractors replaced horses; plastic replaced tinware; central heating replaced chimneys. Travellers, like many settled people, were forced to migrate to urban areas in order to make a living (25% of all Travellers are now resident in the Dublin area.)

This migration of Travellers to towns and cities has made it increasingly difficult for Travellers to be nomadic. With their independent trades obsolete many Travellers were forced to become dependent on social welfare. This in turn has increased or hastened the sedentarization process. In order to claim social welfare one must establish a fixed address. The widespread prejudice and racism of the majority population means there are many assumptions made about Travellers abusing social welfare (despite the fact that up until March 1990 every Traveller in the country had to sign on at 11am on Thursday.) Therefore it is usually more difficult for a Traveller's claim for social welfare to be processed than for a settled person's. Once a claim has come through the Traveller is usually reluctant to move to another camp or town because the whole process shall have to be initiated again. There are usually long delays (up to six weeks) in processing claims and the transferring of a claim from one social welfare office to another is not readily facilitated. One result of this process is that Travellers are less nomadic.

It would be wrong to assume that Travellers are totally dependent on social welfare. Some remain self-employed through selling car parts and collecting scrap; others operate as market traders buying in bulk and selling singularly. Some, dependent on social welfare, supplement their income through selling car parts on a small scale, through Traveller women begging, or through scavenging on dumps.

Whilst saying that it is increasingly difficult for Travellers to be nomadic this aspect of their culture is nevertheless maintained. Nomadism manifests itself in different ways. Some Travellers are constantly on the move and would travel most of the year; others move on a seasonal basis. Some are semi-nomadic and would remain in a particular area, although perhaps at different camps, for a period of months. Others remain in one camp or area for up to several years duration and may then move. Some would be living in houses or trailers or a mixture of both during their travels.

Throughout this period the main statutory response to Travellers has been policies of forced settlement and assimilation. Despite this Travellers have remained a vibrant and readily identifiable community. However this denial of their culture by the majority population, the restrictions put on travel, the widespread discrimination has meant that some Travellers through these experiences of being excluded have become maladjusted and there are increasing levels of delinquency and abuse of alcohol. This will lead to further marginalisation and dependency. At the same time other Travellers are coming up with alternative and viable income generating activities. The traditional dynamism and adaptability of Travellers may see them through the present crisis in their culture.

b) State/Voluntary response:

"It is not considered that there is any alternative to a positive drive for housing Itinerants if a permanent solution to the problem of itinerancy, based on absorption and integration, is to be found." (1)

Official state policy since the early 1960's has been to settle Travellers, as reflected in the quote above from the Government Commission on Itinerancy. This document was a key influence in the development of the statutory and voluntary responses to Travellers. The report defines the problem as itinerancy and the solution as a process of rehabilitation and settlement. The Travellers were defined as dropouts and deviants from the settled norm by this analysis. The statutory sector was fully supported by the voluntary sector in this. This understanding of *"the problem of Itinerancy"* has dominated work with Travellers down through the years to such an extent that it is still very widespread among the majority population.

In 1983 a second government commission on Travellers published its report. It rejected the concept of "absorption" and replaced it with "integration". It also abandoned the term itinerant and replaced it with Traveller. It was more liberal in tone than the 1963 report. This liberalism was manifested in the manner in which it stressed individual decision making but avoided the possibility of a collective response. *"The extent to which they (Travellers) will integrate with the settled community will depend on individual decisions by them and not on decisions by Travellers as a whole or any grouping of them".* (2).

This contributes to the piecemeal approach to policy making which exists. It ignores the possibility of Travellers being provided with the necessary information about schooling, accommodation and health issues etc., which

would enable them to make informed choices based on a common understanding of how they could safeguard and resource their identity and lifestyle. This report also states that while there had *"been some academic debate on the question whether Travellers comprise a distinct culture, an ethnic group or sub-culture and, particularly, a sub-culture of poverty"* there was no agreement among researchers *"as to the origins of Travellers or their status as a group."*

The report further stated that it was not within the terms of reference of the Government Review Body to resolve the issue. The task of the Review Body was *"to review current policies and services for the Travelling people and to make recommendations to improve the existing situation."*

This position wrongly assumes that the question of identity is an academic one with little relevance for the concrete situation. A clearer understanding of identity, culture and ethnicity would have ensured that there would have been different recommendations from the Review Body. These recommendations would have been culturally appropriate. This means that specific provisions would have been designed to meet Travellers needs, rather than expecting Travellers to adapt to provisions-whether in education, health care, or accommodation — which have been designed by settled people for settled people.

Reports show the extent of the problems faced by Travellers. In 1986 the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) produced a report on Travellers concluding that *"the circumstances of the Irish Travelling People are intolerable. No humane and decent society, once made aware of such circumstances, could permit them to persist."* This report showed that 48% of Travellers had no access to piped water; 50% had no access to toilet facilities; and 54% had no access to electricity supply. (3)

In 1989 the Health Research Board produced its study. They found that *"male Travellers have over twice the risk of dying in a given year than settled males, whereas for female Travellers the risk is increased more than threefold."* (4) Other disturbing statistics included a Traveller infant mortality rate that was nearly three times that of the settled population, and a Traveller life expectancy that was about ten years less than settled people's. Other incidents that testify to the problems faced by Travellers, have been common. Last winter there was a series of tragic deaths of Traveller children burned in caravans. A lot of media attention was given to these.

While the presentation of these statistics and the publicity given to these incidents is important as a pressure for action, their interpretation is usually unhelpful. The ESRI report declares that *"the main reason for the persistence of these conditions is the failure of local authorities to provide housing in the quantity needed and demanded."* The Health Research Board seeks to distinguish between *"housed Travellers"* and *"unhoused Travellers,"* showing greater incidence of health problems among the latter. Reports of the caravan fire deaths tended to stress the dangers of living in a caravan.

As such these reports all feed into a central project of assimilation. The way of the settled community is best, the Travellers way is fraught with danger. This is just another case of blaming the victim. It is racist. When a house burns down, settled people are not told to go and live in caravans. Rather, research is carried out, new standards set and new safer construction techniques implemented. Why was this not the response of those in authority to the caravan fires?

All fail to recognise the ethnic identity and culture of the Traveller. The Traveller way of life must be resourced just as is the settled community way of life. The living conditions and health status of the Travellers must be improved by providing resources on their terms. Nomadism as a way of life must be researched and adequately provided for. However the response to these reports has been insignificant-for better or worse. These levels of inaction can only be a measure of the institutional racism in our society. The situation described might easily be allowed persist just because the authorities, having failed to assimilate the Travellers, are now turning their back on them and refusing to dialogue with them as to how their way of life can best be resourced.

Throughout this period, 1960 - 1990, the state and a majority within the voluntary sector have been working together in partnership to solve what is all too often seen as "the Traveller problem". This partnership assumed that there was no conflict of interests in what Travellers wanted and what the state wanted to provide for them. There was an assumed consensus of what was in the interests of Travellers. The voluntary sector represented in this model was usually all settled people, rarely were Travellers included in this partnership. This voluntary sector saw official reports, drawn up by "experts", as being beyond question. The state set out policy and programmes for Travellers and frequently this voluntary sector implemented this agenda for the state.

They set up local settlement committees in response to the publication of the Government Report on Itinerancy to help integrate Travellers into local settled communities. The community development approach they adopted was an approach that defined Travellers as in need of development. The two main methods adopted to ensure development of Travellers was through education and housing. Much of the work in this sector was informed by a Christian ethos which had as core values the concepts of voluntarism and charity. This can be problematic. Voluntarism stresses the need for goodwill rather than the qualifications to do the job and it leaves the question of accountability too vague. Charity emphasises doing things for people rather than with people. Charity tends to ensure the powerful retain their power and it can all too often create destructive dependency. This partnership between the state and the voluntary sector, which largely excluded Travellers, has been the dominant model throughout the period 1960 - mid 1980's.

c) Traveller/Settled Voluntary Response

Another model was also evident at different times during this period and particularly so over the past five years. This model recognises Travellers as an ethnic group. In this model there were Traveller only initiatives and initiatives of Travellers working in partnership with settled people. The first evidence of this would have been the briefly lived Itinerant Action Group (IAG). This group protested for practical actions to be taken as a result of the recommendations of the Commission on Itinerancy. They marched to the parliament, they fought eviction orders and even set up a makeshift school on an unofficial site. They developed alliances with the student movement and more radical groups, e.g. Housing Action Group, and succeeded in getting a lot of media attention. The group was broken up however when a key figure was arrested on possession of explosives charges. He was deported but there are suspicions to this day that he was the victim of a set up to discredit the whole group. Over the next twenty years it was the consensus model of partnership between the voluntary sector and the state that predominated.

The early 1980s have witnessed the emergence of a number of organisations committed to building a practice based on an acknowledgement of Travellers as an ethnic group and based on an understanding that defines the central problem as racism. These groups adopt a different relationship with the state and attempt to set their own agenda rather than just carrying out that of the state unquestioningly.

In 1982 a Committee for the Rights of Travellers was formed. This was made up of Travellers and settled people. It formed at a time when there were particularly violent evictions of Travellers in a Dublin suburb called Tallaght. Travellers faced evictions, huge demonstrations, protests, and threats of being burned out. This committee supported Travellers in the face of this racism. For the first time in history, with their support, a Traveller woman, Nan Joyce, ran for Dail election in the Dublin South West constituency in 1982, to highlight the situation of Travellers. A year later she was arrested and charged with stealing and receiving stolen goods. After much negative publicity the charges were dropped. (This revived memories of the frame-up of another activist nearly twenty years previously.)

In 1984 Minceir Misli was formed out of the Committee for the Rights of Travellers. This was an all-Traveller pressure group and they adopted tactics of protest and confrontation like their predecessors twenty years previously (IAG). They organised public fasts, marches, and occupied local authority offices. They developed alliances with other groups e.g. Trade Unions, Women's Groups and Third World Groups. They achieved a high media profile but were unable to attract a wider Traveller audience; this difficulty demonstrated the need for work which will create the conditions for a broad based, independent Traveller movement.

Another initiative about this time is the group of which I am a member, the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group (DTEDG). This is a mixed group of settled people and Travellers who came together in 1983, at a time when there was particularly strong hostility towards Travellers (as outlined earlier.) Our analysis of existing models of working with Travellers revealed that both statutory and voluntary sectors had been more concerned with integration and settlement than with self determination and rights.

We recognized and promoted the view that Travellers are an ethnic group with a right to maintain and develop their distinctive way of life. Part of our work is to challenge the widespread racism, prejudice and discrimination towards Travellers and to promote community work approaches within the Traveller community. This approach is radically different from the individualistic social pathology model which had been the main direction for professionals involved with Travellers over the previous twenty years.

In this model a different relationship with the state is explored. Attempts are made to set our own social policy agenda rather than carrying out that as defined by the state. New initiatives will be explored which will be based on a recognition and respect of the Travellers' ethnic identity and culture. Work will be carried out not only with Travellers but also with the wider settled community. This work covers three main areas - direct work with Travellers; work with the majority population; work on research and policy formulation. Specific examples of our work and how they relate to a promotion of ethnicity will be highlighted later in this paper.

The partnership between settled people and Travellers organised in these groups outlined in this section is, as in most partnerships, an uneasy relationship. There can be abuses of power within this relationship. The mere presence of a Traveller at a meeting can be wrongly called participation. A real partnership must be based on trust. The parties in the partnership must be able to participate as equals. Information and access to resources must be shared; language used should be common to all parties.

Current Context

Ireland in the late 1980's and coming into the 1990's has witnessed significant developments in work with Travellers. More Travellers are asserting their identity publicly. The nature of the debate is changing from a focus on settlement to issues like racism and ethnicity being discussed and informing some of the work. These developments are creating the space for other changes to happen. However although the content of the debate is changing, real change is slow.

a) Anti-Racism

Racism describes the practice of a dominant group, the settled community, that uses its power to block the minority group, the Travellers, from practising their ethnicity, from living their culture, or ultimately, from being Travellers. This is a practice that labels the culture of the Travellers as deviance and seeks to impose the values of the dominant group on the Travellers. It is the racism of the settled majority that is at the root of the economic, political and cultural exclusion of the Travellers.

Racism operates at two levels. At an individual level, which is the more overt and the more readily disturbing. Examples abound such as when a publican

refuses to serve a Traveller, a cinema puts a notice on it's door stating "No Travellers", settled people march on Travellers' campsites or when they drive Travellers out of local authority housing.

However it also operates at a more hidden level called the institutional level. Institutional racism occurs in the actions and practice of the organisations and institutions of our society. Examples include a legislature that refuses to pass anti-discrimination legislation, local authorities that place boulders to obstruct a nomadic way of life, a social welfare system that segregates and abuses Travellers and an education system that makes no mention of Travellers and their way of life in the curriculum.

Our strategy in the DTEDG has been to develop alliances with other specific issue groups in Irish society - both mainstream and alternative - in order to get them to include Travellers as part of their agenda. We would argue that unless specific provision is made for Travellers they are in effect excluded. Examples of this strategy would be getting the Local Government and Public Services Union (now called IMPACT) of which many social workers, community welfare officers and other professionals who would have on-going contact with Travellers are members, to pass a motion at their annual congress 1989 to recognise Travellers as an ethnic group. This year, 1990, a motion was passed which mandated IMPACT to organise a special seminar to promote a deeper understanding of the implications of the ethnic identity of Travellers and to draw up guidelines for union policy in relation to Travellers. Another motion was also passed calling for union support for the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation. Another example is provided by the national womens network organisation, the Council for the Status of Women (CSW), which passed a motion at their annual congress condemning the segregated supplementary welfare service provided for Travellers in the Dublin area.

Third World groups have been encouraged to debate racism both in terms of their own relationships with groups in the Third World and in terms of Irish society. Political parties are being approached to draw up policies in relation to Travellers that recognise and provide for their separate culture. The Labour party were drawing up an Equality Bill and members of DTEDG were involved in ensuring sections of the Bill would make particular provision for Travellers.

We have also been involved in approaching universities and teacher-training courses to offer modules on 'Travellers and Racism' for students. Much media

work is undertaken in both challenging reports about Travellers, and also in promoting positive initiatives which are being undertaken by Travellers themselves or groups working with them

These developments are the start of a process whereby other groups take on board the specific needs of Travellers within their own remit. Through developing these alliances more settled people in Irish society begin to challenge settled peoples' racism. When we talk of racism or racial hatred there is an automatic assumption that we are referring to relationships between groups exhibiting clear biological or physical differences. The experience of Irish people in Britain and of Travellers in Ireland, indicate that this is not the case. In the absence of clear physical differences other features are brought into play, usually cultural. It proves difficult to get this argument accepted, especially in Ireland. Racism is not seen as a problem where the majority of people, including Travellers, are white and speak English. This denial of the cultural differences between Travellers and settled people is of course racist.

b) Nomadism

Travellers have always experienced a denial of their culture by the majority population. Assimilationist policies have been forced on them down through the years as outlined earlier. Travelling or nomadism is of course one of the distinguishing features in their culture. It has a variety of functions - cultural, social, economic and political. Over the past thirty years there have been important changes which have transformed this feature of the culture. Their nomadic way of life has been criminalised by equating it with vagrancy. Traditional halting spots have been removed through road and housing developments; huge boulders are placed on potential stopping places. Evictions, prohibition orders, settlement policies, and the widespread prejudice and racism of the majority population who seek injunctions to stop provision for accommodation for Travellers in their localities, have all served to restrict the nomadism of Travellers. Rural nomadism has been replaced to a great extent by urban-based nomadism and the adoption of a semi-sedentary lifestyle. The threat to Travellers lifestyle brought about by restrictions on travel and the failure of the majority population to recognise and accept their separate cultural identity and ethnicity puts increasing pressures on Travellers.

A number of individual Travellers, and Traveller groups, have been involved in expressing and celebrating the nomadic nature of Traveller way of life. In 1989 the first ever 'Traveller Pilgrimage' took place in Ireland, and this June a second one was organised. These were planned by a group of Travellers and settled people working together. There are many levels of meaning to this event - a traditional pilgrimage; an expression of solidarity between Travellers and settled people; a time for reflection on Travellers situation in Ireland; and an assertion of the right to travel, to be nomadic. These pilgrimages received a high public profile through media coverage. The fact that over 100 Travellers and settled people travel across the country for a week, stopping on the roadside in different towns on the route, was clearly and rightly interpreted as an assertion of their nomadic lifestyle. Travellers are visible and willing to assert this aspect of their culture which has been frowned upon by settled society. Support from bishops has been forthcoming: Bishop Conway speaking at the pilgrimage in Sligo (July 1990) said that the pilgrimages' objectives were to *"achieve liberation from the discrimination which oppresses you; liberation first of all to live your own traditional way of life according to your own culture, to be Travellers..."*.

Alongside this, wealthy Travellers in Ireland clearly assert their right to be nomadic, particularly in summertime. A lot of negative media coverage is given to this group. There are attempts to create or represent divisions between this group of "Rich Traders" and ordinary Travellers. The majority of settled people have absolutely no comprehension of the role of nomadism in the Traveller lifestyle. Whatever the reasons poverty-striken Travellers may have for living in trailers settled people simply cannot cope with wealthy Travellers living a Traveller way of life. This is partly the Irish psyche which attempts to force uniformity in a perceived monocultural society. This expression, by rich Travellers, of their culture certainly puts the nail in the coffin of the sub-culture of poverty theory on Travellers.

Another recent initiative in asserting the right to be nomadic has been the work of the Traveller sub-group of the National Campaign for the Homeless. This group, again comprised of Travellers and settled people from throughout the country, spent over a year meeting and discussing the role of nomadism and the implications of nomadism for accommodation policies for Travellers. A document has recently been published (July 1990) which sets out what are seen as useful guidelines in drawing up accommodation policies for Travellers. The first one states:- *"all accommodation policies need to take into consideration Travellers separate cultural identity and in particular to acknowledge the role of nomadism in their way of life"*. This is a far cry from the 1963 *"positive drive for housing Itinerants."*

Another related development has been the appointment of a Traveller as the National Co-ordinator for Accommodation. At the last AGM of the National Council for Travelling People, he spoke of the importance of nomadism in Travellers' life and encouraged local committees to take this aspect of Travellers' culture on in their work. He also spoke out against the concept of "our Travellers". This 'concept' has become increasingly prevalent in the vocabulary of local committees over the past few years. There could originally have been a positive aspect to this-in order to encourage local authorities to make accommodation provisions for Travellers usually resident in the area. However the same argument can be really divisive between Travellers. When Travellers who are leading a nomadic way of life pull into the town they are 'disowned' by the local committees who then also use their patronage with the longer term Traveller residents to get them to encourage the new arrivals to leave. It is likely this appeal will have fallen on deaf ears, nonetheless it is very significant that this officer is a Traveller, living on the roadside, and asserting the right to travel. It is very removed from previous reports of Accommodation Officers to AGM's where they more or less merely enumerated the numbers of Travellers in houses, on sites etc.

c) Legislation:

In 1988 the government introduced the "Prohibition of Incitement to Racial Religious or National Hatred Bill". The purpose of introducing this bill was to remove one of the obstacles in the way of the ratification of the U.N. covenant on Civil and Political Rights which Ireland was required to do. We were outraged that Travellers were not included and recognised this as an opportunity to have Travellers mentioned explicitly in a parliamentary bill. We proposed an amendment which would ensure the recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group protected by the Bill. We undertook a campaign and lobbied all the members of parliament on the issue. We also made contacts with lesbian and gay men's groups who were also lobbying for inclusion in this Bill. Media work was carried out on a very systematic basis stressing the importance and implications of having Travellers specifically mentioned in this bill. This provided an opportunity to debate racism and ethnicity in a wide public sphere. A general election halted the passage of the bill. However in 1989 the new coalition government re-introduced the legislation and Travellers were specifically mentioned.

By naming Travellers the government have in effect recognised the ethnic identity of Travellers. This is the first step in a longer process. Under this piece of legislation it would be quite difficult to take a test-case to court because

"intent" has to be proved . However work is now being undertaken to ensure more comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation is introduced that incorporates all the implications of Travellers' ethnicity.

Unless Travellers are specifically named in legislation or provisions, they are in effect excluded. An example of this was the Dublin Area County Development Plan introduced in 1983. In this there was no specific mention of Traveller halting sites. There was provision for caravan parks and it was presumed later that this would cover provisions for Travellers. However in 1988 a number of residents associations, objecting to the proposed location of halting sites in their areas, took injunctions out against the County Council to stop the building of sites. They won their case. Therefore the county council had to introduce a variation to the Development Plan. The residents associations in many other parts of the city where sites were proposed, orchestrated a campaign where thousands of settled people objected to this variation. Subsequently in March 1989 oral hearings were organised by the county council to hear settled peoples objections and it was only in June 1989 that a variation to the County Development Plan was adopted, which provided for the construction of halting sites in all zones in the Dublin area (with the exception of town centres and neighbourhood centres). In the meantime a lot of anti-Traveller feeling had been whipped up and there was a lot of negative media publicity.

Currently the Irish government are under-taking a review of the local government system. We have a highly centralised system of government in Ireland, many sectors are arguing for reform that will increase the powers of local government and be more accountable to local people. However this type of development of democracy in Ireland could be threatening for Travellers. The reality is that increased local powers may mean increased racism towards Travellers given the record of the relationship local authorities have with Travellers, characterised by evictions, prohibition orders and poor provisions.

Travellers must be explicitly named and provided for in the new legislation or else they will in effect be excluded. The DTEDG have made a submission to the advisory committee on local government reform calling for the introduction of an anti-discrimination clause in any new legislation which would protect the rights of Travellers and ensure that their culture is resourced. We also call for Travellers representation on new regional authorities, which may be introduced, through an instrument of reserved positions (a principle already well established vis a vis women and minority groups in multi-cultural

societies). We also call for the participation of Travellers through statutory sub-committees which would be organised in each region. These sub-committees would include representatives of voluntary groups working within the Traveller community, civil servants, semi-state representatives and locally elected councillors in the region, to develop policy in relation to the needs of Travellers resident in the area on a permanent or temporary basis. Resources would have to be put into these sub-committees and resources would have to be given to all involved in the forum to ensure equal participation.

d) The Courts:

In the recent past a number of Travellers have used the legal system in order to pursue provision of basic human rights in terms that respect a Traveller identity. In 1982 a Traveller woman, Rosella Mc Donald took a case to the High and Supreme Court. She successfully established the principle that local authorities could not evict Travellers from the roadside or unofficial sites unless they offered them a suitable alternative (official) site. This marked the first time a Traveller had taken on the state as far as Supreme Court level. Unfortunately the ruling is much abused; there are numerous incidents where local authorities send eviction notices and offer Travellers "alternative sites" which are not really "suitable alternatives" sometimes for cultural reasons, e.g. different families living on the site whom the Travellers wouldn't mix with. However it is usual that the sites, even though official, are in such dreadful conditions that most Travellers refuse to live on them. Therefore the eviction is seen as valid and the family must move on, often to face another eviction order the following week.

In May 1989 a group of Travellers in Limerick, with the support of the Limerick Committee for Travelling people, took Limerick Corporation to court over their failure to provide halting sites. The High Court supported the Travellers complaint. The judgement is significant in that it gave legal recognition to a separate Traveller identity and to the fact that Travellers have specific needs. This is in effect a recognition of the ethnic identity of the Travellers and of the need for special, culturally appropriate provisions for the Traveller community.

Of these developments none represent an end in themselves. However collectively they contribute towards creating the conditions for Travellers to be accepted as an ethnic group in Irish society. They have challenged many individuals who work with Travellers to re-examine their approach and to become conscious of the values they are operating out of. They have illustrated

to the state, local authorities etc. that Travellers are going to take actions to assert their demands for self-determination in Ireland. The danger in this of course is that there will be a backlash against these initiatives and Travellers will be at the receiving end of even more overt racism than todate.

Travellers Identity

This section outlines the current status of Travellers identity in Ireland.

a) Nature of ethnicity:

If you asked the majority of Travellers *"are you a member of an ethnic group?"* it is likely they would not understand what you were asking. This is not the language they use to describe their community. If you asked Travellers would they like to be settled people they might say yes. If you discussed this further they would explain that they'd like to be able to go out for a night and be sure of getting into a pub, not be followed around shops, not to have their kids put into special classes, not to have to sign on at a special time and day for social welfare. However if you asked them would they like their children to be settled people they would usually be quite adamant that no they definitely would not. They see settled people as not having respect for themselves and being very isolated in communities.

As one Traveller woman said when discussing differences between Travellers and settled people: *"I'm proud to be a Traveller, you feel free. If a person says to me 'what are you?' I'll say a Traveller. Settled people in houses don't have brothers and sisters around them whereas we have everyone. When our sons or daughters get married, they don't move away."*

Most Travellers want to be treated equally in Irish society, not to have to face discrimination daily, but not to have to deny who they are in order to be treated equally. This point can be very problematic. The reality is that to most people, and to Travellers in particular, through bitter experience, "different" is understood as "not equal", and "same" is understood as "equal". The challenge is to present an argument that illustrates in reality that differences are valid and that a different culture adds to the richness of society. Travellers are entitled to be different and likewise they are entitled to be treated equally in Irish society at both an individual and institutional level.

On the first DTEDG course for Travellers (January 1985) during a session on Travellers, a question was posed to the group "were you ever discriminated against?" Blank faces looked back and they all said no. The course organisers found this hard to believe and then asked "were you ever put out of anywhere?" Immediately many examples were forthcoming from being put off buses, not being served in hairdressers, followed around in shops etc. etc. It indicated how language can be used and abused. Over the past five and a half years the word discrimination has entered the Travellers language. Today if you mention it, the majority of Travellers will understand what you are talking about. This has been achieved through an education process, mainly through an increasing number of Travellers, and particularly those who appear on the media, talking about it, and naming the word discrimination. Over the past two years a similar process is happening in relation to ethnicity. More Travellers are becoming familiar with the word and the implications of this for their future.

Ethnicity is a difficult concept. Dr. Charles Husband has described it as "a subjective experience of what you are in relationship to being part of a group. Ethnicity is about collective identity, a sense of consciousness of being something". It is not something that is apparent all or even part of the time. It defies stereotyping, which is what the dominant society attempts to do to Travellers a lot of the time. Ethnicity is about boundaries. Travellers see themselves as different and are seen as different by the dominant society. Yet they are constantly put under pressure to define the content of these differences. There is rarely pressure put on the majority community to define the content of what constitutes their ethnicity. The content of these differences is not really what is important. The important thing is to recognise that there are boundaries and they are real. "It says Travellers in evoking their own identity and asserting that they are an ethnic group don't have to prove it twenty four hours of the day". A Traveller living in their extended family on a site would not be as conscious of their ethnicity as if they went into a room crowded full of settled people.

Ethnicity operates at an individual conscious level and can be used as a tool to assert the right to self-determination. There is also a structural side to ethnicity. This has to do with the way in which there are resources channelled and made available to a group to put into practice and experience their ethnicity. The fact that there are only 20,000 Travellers in Ireland (80% under 25 years) and dispersed throughout the country has meant that they have very little political clout. Very few resources are put into Travellers' ethnicity. Initiatives in medical care, legal system, media, schooling, accommodation,

employment, are usually designed by settled people for settled people. Resources must be put into identifying culturally appropriate service provisions for Travellers. The language and history of Travellers must be researched and the information made accessible to Travellers. Resources must be put into making the nomadic lifestyle of Travellers possible and viable.

b) **Advances:**

A notable shift over the past few years has been the number of Travellers in public spheres who openly identify themselves as Travellers. This is a huge change and it is interesting to hear older Travellers comment on it. They would have survived through the years by being invisible and living on the periphery of the system. They think younger Travellers are foolish to be asserting their identity in a public fashion and are very threatened by it. However younger Travellers realise that they have to dialogue and deal with settled people in an increasing variety of situations and therefore they are learning how to live in an intercultural context. They can live in their own communities as Travellers but they can also survive and relate with settled people as equals with pride in their own identity. Prior to this it was usually an either/or situation.

In 1987 a Traveller, Martin Collins, won the Young Citizen of the Year Award. RTE (the national television network) invited him onto the Late Late Show - which is the most popular chat show in Ireland. This interview had a huge impact throughout Ireland (it has an average audience of 1,056,000 weekly). It changed a lot of settled peoples' perceptions of Travellers. However, and even more importantly, it had a huge impact on the Traveller community in Ireland (and Britain where it is screened during the week). Many Travellers expressed their shock and yet pride in seeing a Traveller chat so easily and confidently to Gay Byrne and discuss Travellers' lives, problems, celebrations etc.

Likewise, an Irish soap opera called Glenroe (which has an average weekly audience of 1,223,000) now features Travellers as part of the show. This occurred when in one episode one of the characters referred to "knackers" (a racist term for Travellers). Travellers wrote in and said they found this offensive and that it confirmed and added to settled peoples' prejudices. Subsequently the actor concerned visited our project and talked to Travellers. An on-going relationship developed with him. At the same time members of the group were involved in doing drama (usually sketches pertinent to Travellers way of life). A theatre in education company (Team Theatre) decided to do a play about Travellers. We were involved in writing the script

and in on-going consultations about it. One of the Travellers Michael Collins was offered a part with this group and toured Ireland with the play.

Later a settled actor with this company (Team) got a part in Glenroe as a Traveller. He would contact the DTEDG about content of scripts, seeking a Traveller perspective etc. Michael Collins argued it was better for a Traveller to play the part of a Traveller. Since then he has made several appearances in the series (and has even managed to get most of his family parts as extras). In the coming season (this autumn) he has negotiated to have a speaking part. There are various reactions to the programme contents - it's often too close to the bone - however overall the feedback has been positive. Settled people are challenged once again in their perceptions of Travellers and their understanding of Travellers' culture. The series highlights issues such as discrimination and racism.

It is significant that an increasing number of Travellers are asserting their identity publicly in a positive way. Prior to this many Travellers had been "successful", however "success" usually meant having to deny your ethnic origin. Many Travellers were encouraged in doing this by 'liberal' settled people who argue that you should not highlight the fact that you are a Traveller, it is on individual merit that success is measured. However although this argument may have some validity, the negative side to it is that many young Travellers have nothing to aspire to. Usually the only time they hear about Travellers publicly is in a negative context in the media. This is changing, Travellers can be successful without having to deny their identity and many are willingly and openly asserting their identity. This can only auger well for the future.

Another positive development has been the emergence of a National Traveller Women's Forum since summer 1988. Traveller women come together from all over the country to meet one another and share experiences. Settled women working with Travellers are involved in a supportive role. Traveller women are actively involved in planning national seminars. Discussions on particular issues of concern to Traveller women are discussed and there is also a fun side to the day. A hot meal and creche are provided. Different groups from throughout the country take on to host and organise national seminars on different themes. Three to four national meetings are held during the year; the forum has become successfully established and has country-wide involvement. Media attention has also been achieved through the work of the forum. Many of the women at these national meetings are struck by the similarities in their

experiences. The forum meetings provide a valuable opportunity for the Traveller women to meet and discuss issues in a formal (though enjoyable) setting. It is through these discussions that they realise many Travellers are being treated badly throughout the country; that discrimination is not confined to specific geographical areas or narrow-minded people. It is hoped that in the future the forum will take on policy issues and look at strategies for carrying out actions collectively on a national basis.

c) Setbacks:

Despite the many successes to date it would be foolhardy to ignore the fact that there are many ways in which Travellers continue to be perceived in a negative way by the wider settled society. Part of the reason for this is because of the denial of identity. A number of Travellers who are doing well - business people, musicians or spokespeople - deny the fact that they are Travellers. They are not contributing to the debate for Travellers rights in Irish society to the degree to which they have the potential. This presents itself in two forms a) those who don't assert their ethnic origin b)those who deny it (often with excuses like "I've been settled all my life".) It is easier for settled people to recognise the woman begging on the street as a Traveller than it is to identify the successful businessman who is a Traveller. I am frequently struck by the number of times that people comment, "I met a Traveller recently but they weren't your typical Traveller, they were well dressed or well spoken etc. etc."

There is a presumption that Travellers are a homogenous group and whilst they all share ethnic origin there is much diversity within the group. There are different opinions between Travellers about policies, the church, settled people, Ireland and also about Traveller concerns eg. begging. Some of these different opinions would be based on things such as differences in age, gender etc. However many of the divisions among Travellers are constructed through settled people's influence. The educational system has resulted in some Travellers who have managed to survive within it, coming out the other end being very confused about their identity, not having been given access to their own history or culture. Even more insidious is the fact that frequently they are given very negative images of Travellers. Likewise divisions are constructed by settled people who persist in drawing differences between Travellers who live in houses and those who live on the roadside. Some Travellers who feel thankful or under obligation to particular settled people feel they should support them even if this means going against the interests of the wider Traveller community. The conditions need to be created where family and area divisions are broken down, where settled people's presence and influences are

removed, and Travellers debate their own issues amongst their own people without having public disagreements between opposing opinions.

d) European Links:

Travellers have begun to get information and make contacts with Gypsy groups and other ethnic groups eg. two Travellers attended the Romani Congress in Warsaw, April 1990. This is a positive development because it means there has been a sharing of strategies and tactics used by different groups to assert their demands to be treated as equal citizens in a wide variety of societies. These links are significant because Travellers begin to realise that there is institutional racism at an international level. For years through settlement committees, volunteers and the education system Travellers have been given the message that there is something wrong with being a Traveller, that they are second class citizens, stupid etc. It is when people realise that what is happening to themselves in Ireland is similarly happening to Tatters in Norway that they realise it is not accidental and that there is a reason for this.

Travellers would see many differences between themselves and Gypsies however an increasing number are looking beyond the image they may have of Gypsies eating snails or having several wives, to the fact that Gypsies are also discriminated against, in the same variety of ways that Travellers are. It is only now that Travellers are making links with Gypsy goups and focussing on the fact that they have more in common with Gypsies than they have with settled people. The links with Gypsies and an appreciation of Gypsy history and heritage is being positively promoted in a variety of ways eg.through some training programmes and courses, and events organised by the Traveller Women's Forum.

References

1. Report of the Commission on Itinerancy, Government Publications Sales Office, August 1963.
2. Report of the Travelling People Review Body, Government Publications Sales Office, February 1983.
3. The Population Structure and Living Circumstances of Irish Travellers, Economic and Social Research Institute, Paper 131, July 1986.
4. The Travellers Health Status Study, Health Research Board, Barry, Herrity and Solan, 1987.

Community Work and Travellers in Ireland New Analysis and New Directions

by Anastasia Crickley,
Niall Crowley,
and John O'Connell

INTRODUCTION

Ideologies of assimilation, individual pathology, group generalisation, and stereotyping, and, some would argue, cultural annihilation have to date informed many of the policies for and work with ethnic and minority groups throughout Europe. Over the past three decades a literature which incorporates a critical analysis and exposure of these positions has gradually been developed. This critique has moved through the initial concern with 'sensitive assimilation' to a focus on the need for better 'race relations' to an acknowledgement that racism in its various institutional and individual forms is a key feature to be addressed. New modes of practice have also been developed but traditional work approaches and the thinking which often unconsciously informs them have been particularly hard to dislodge. This has been especially true of work with Travellers in Ireland. The 'good intentions' of the individual practitioner are implied to be self evident because they have chosen to work with such a 'problem group' or because of the avowedly liberal and equalising nature of their chosen profession of social work. Their subsequent actions are put beyond criticism.

However the time for a rethink is now upon us. These practices and their parallel policies have failed even in their own terms. Assimilation has not happened — in Ireland accommodation policies overtly based on this premise have had to be abandoned and arguably replaced by strategies covertly holding to the same objective. Travellers also defy generalisation and individualist pathological models have failed to correct their own so called 'malfunctions'. Our contacts with minority migrant and ethnic groups including Travellers and Gypsies across Europe indicate that the position there is similar. We are faced not only with a lack of decision making and rupture from the failed certainties with regard to minorities but also a persistent wall of silence with regard to even naming some of the realities involved — it has, for

example, proven extremely difficult to get racism acknowledged in addressing E.C. poverty through the Poverty 3 programme, and the possibly racist implications of the proposed Social Charter for Gypsies, Travellers, and migrants remain unaddressed.

New policies and practices are needed and indeed a new non-dualistic relationship between the two. The new Europe will not address our concerns unless we provide the reasons, lobby, and logic required. Over the past number of years some new ways of working with rather than for ethnic and minority groups, which do not subscribe to the false analyses, false problems, and false solutions mentioned above, have been devised and developed and have been found to contain some hope for the future. It is important that the hopelessness of the failed false solutions is dissipated through spreading news of these initiatives. It is important also to remove the stranglehold of the powerful dominant group pursuing the false solutions armed usually with the support of statutory and voluntary funding.

As a contribution to this process we present in this paper an analysis of and background to the model that we have devised for our own work. In order to do this we will first outline the basic principles of our model and the discipline - community work - on which it is based. We will then contextualise the model and our rationale for using it in work with Travellers in Ireland and the prevailing perceptions of Travellers today. Coming from both of these we will name the key elements of our model and give an overview of the work which flows from it. Lastly we will draw some conclusions and make recommendations for further consideration.

SECTION ONE

Community Work — A Theoretical Perspective

Community work is not just simply any form of community intervention. In particular we are conscious of the need to distinguish between community care (as opposed to institutional care), group work (which may be a component in a community work process), social casework, and community work. In attempting to draw out these distinctions we are immediately conscious of the language problem and the way in which these terms may have different meanings, translations, and interpretations across Europe — for example the broad and varied use of the German term 'Socialarbeit'. Quite clearly a

prerequisite to any useful follow through at European level from discussions like today's is an agreed glossary of terms so as to facilitate communication between us and make meaningful European exchange and policy development possible. At a glance this task may seem superficial and far from relevant. It is essential however for any E.C. or Europe wide progress. It is essential also if our discussions are not to end up cul-de-sacs addressing false and purely irrelevant issues such as whether community work is merely a method of social work or whether either is an umbrella term which automatically includes the other.

In terms of definition the British Gulbenkian report of 1968 captures for us the fundamental elements involved in community work. The report sees community work as concerned with work for social change through the twin processes of -

a) Analysis of social and economic situations,
b) Helping people to work collectively to bring about change, make decisions regarding collective needs, and impact on decisions affecting their community (whether local, national, or international).

Community work from this perspective is based on principles of collective participation and empowerment. It is concerned not just with the task at hand, but also with the way in which work towards the objective is carried out, and with whom it is undertaken. Essentially those experiencing the problem play key roles in its definition and in developing responses to it. Community work is seen to be about developing a more just and equitable society through collective rather than individual means.

We use the generic term community work as an umbrella word to cover the various methods involved, usually divided into three categories — community development, community organisations and community action. We are conscious however that the terms are used interchangeably. We are especially aware that the 1950's definition of community development which contains many of the above elements but focuses on 'the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of the governmental authorities to improve the economic, social, and cultural conditions of communities' is still used in practice. This approach infers not only a partnership (which may be essential, however limited, for progress) between the state and the people, but also a consensus regarding the definition of and responses to the issues to be addressed. Where such a definition, either consciously or unconsciously,

informs work with Travellers and Gypsies the results as we illustrate later in our outline of work with Travellers in Ireland are inevitably assimilationist and cannot but ignore issues not on the state's agenda — such as nomadism, ethnicity, and racism.

Community work is thus not essentially 'good' in itself. Its principles can be used in a variety of ways. The rhetoric of 'community' also has become increasingly fashionable over the past decade. Ability to use the rhetoric can serve to conceal a practice which contains no community work principles, good, bad or indifferent. A superficial understanding of the principles can equally lead to their tokenistic application in practice — i.e. appointing Travellers to sedentary committees from which they are alienated, or are in awe of, as a means of glibly demonstrating their involvement in decision making. However we feel, and this view has been borne out by our experience, that community work approaches can provide a key to developing new paradigms for work with Travellers.

Firstly community work is a collective rather than an individual method of implementation. As such it can avoid the danger of pathologising individuals, and the consequent definition of the Travellers as the problem rather than people with problems which often bedevils social casework responses. Travellers' extended family and kinship systems already define issues in collective rather than confidential individual terms. Community work like social casework can be a tool of liberation or control but while social work literature portrays social work as a liberal profession graced with mutual tolerance, community work literature is imbued — perhaps overly so — with self criticism and doubts. The fact that community work is centrally concerned with passing on skills and that it is undertaken in a variety of ways — by full time practitioners, by volunteers, or by people using community work methods as part of another job — means also that the issue of control cannot easily be avoided even if it is not always adequately addressed.

Community work with Travellers and Gypsies, as we defined it earlier, essentially takes an anti-racist stand as a crucial part of the struggle for more justice for Travellers. In our view work with Travellers which is not anti-racist implicitly or explicitly props up racism. In effect it is concerned with managing racist social relations — i.e. facilitating accommodation arrangements for Travellers (the primary task given to social workers with Travellers in Ireland), in settled peoples' terms only, thus increasing social control over them.

Essential also to community work committed to justice is an anti-sexist stand which acknowledges the oppression of Traveller women and seeks appropriate ways to address it without blaming them for being Traveller women.

Community work too opens out possibilities for integrating practice with policy development. By its very nature it is concerned with change, including policy change provided it is undertaken in line with community work principles, and not as an elitist exercise. The other elitism however, of the academics and bureaucrats concerned with social policy and administration, often makes it very hard for target groups for such policies and for those working directly with them to play any role in their development — especially if they are not operating out of conservative consensual models. This creates the dualism mentioned earlier but it can as we will show later in the case of the Irish anti-discrimination legislation, be successfully addressed.

Community work interventions for these and other reasons hold out the best hope for supporting Travellers and Gypsies in their struggle for self determination. Community work cannot however address all of the issues faced by Travellers and Gypsies. Social casework, education, health, welfare, and accommodation services each have their own role to play. Each can work to liberate or further control. The real problem emerges if and when one or other of these methods assumes a dominant monopoly position, as we will describe later with regard to work loosely based on an individual pathology approach, carried out by both professionals and well meaning volunteers in Ireland. Indeed it sometimes seems as if Travellers are the last target left to those who feel they have a right and a responsibility to give charity.

Community work with Travellers, as our experience will indicate does not happen automatically. The conditions in which community work can take place have to be created. This necessitates a long term and culturally appropriate education programme and an ongoing learning process, such as we have attempted to undertake, involving learning by settled people as well as Travellers, as prerequisites to any successful work. Shortcuts lead only to tokenism. Community work with Travellers and Gypsies clearly needs to acknowledge the implications of their culture in the development of strategies and processes of work. Failure to do so will quite simply be disastrous i.e. sedentary committee structures and representational models are unlikely to prove useful. Travellers social organisation is around kin and extended family rather than community it must be remembered. Community work with

Travellers also needs to take on board the effects of settled peoples' racist policies on Traveller culture with their consequent dependency, alienation, and reinforcement of power differentials.

These and other issues were important for us in devising, developing, and refining — as we continually do — our model for work with Travellers. The model grew out of a number of other considerations also including the community work background of some group members and the experience of others in the 'Third World' with successful work on similar models. Most of all it grew out of our niggling concern with the direction and consequences of work then being undertaken with Travellers in Ireland. It is to the background of this work that we now turn our attention.

SECTION 2

Community work — The Irish Context

In order to understand the community work approach undertaken by the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group (DTEDG) it is necessary to locate that approach within the broader historical context of work with Travellers in Ireland. The reasons for this being, firstly, that DTEDG was formed in 1983 in response to a situation where the needs of Travellers were not, in our view, being adequately addressed. Secondly, the dominant modes of intervention by settled people in the lives of Travellers were at best not very successful and at worst racist. DTEDG was established in order to develop an alternative approach and to explore innovative measures in the work with Travellers. This approach, founded on the principles of community work, as explained earlier, was in stark contrast to both the approach of the state and that of the voluntary sector at that time.

Up until the 1960s the situation of Irish Travellers was largely ignored by the state. Travellers were dispersed throughout the countryside, kept mostly to themselves and related to the majority population only when necessary. Travellers avoided most of the institutions of the state and pursued an independent way of life travelling the roads of Ireland. The only sign of interest shown by the state was the carrying out of censuses on Travellers in 1944, '52, '56, '60, and '61. Even then the value of the data collected is questionable given the fact that these censuses were undertaken by the Gardai

(Irish police) whose relationship with Travellers was always fraught with tension and mistrust.

The reason for the change in the early 60s had to do with the modernisation of the Irish economy and the growing urbanisation which accompanied this development. Travellers were forced to adjust their traditional way of life and this was manifested first of all in their growing dependence on the state's welfare system. This was in response to the erosion of their traditional mode of survival. Secondly, it was manifested in a shift from a predominantly rural environment where relations were primarily with farmers to a city or town where relations were mainly with working class residents. These new circumstances gave rise to new tensions as Travellers, who up to then were largely out of sight, became more visible and were perceived as a threat by their settled neighbours. Concerns about the value of property were expressed and pressure was brought on the state to intervene.

The first significant intervention by the state was the establishment of a Commission on Itinerancy in 1960 which published a report three years later. The Commission's Report was informed by research into government actions in relation to Travellers and Gypsies in other European countries, particularly the Netherlands. This Report proved to be very important, not only because it articulated the establishment's position on Travellers, but also because it set out the parameters and direction of work with Travellers from then until the early 80s. Central to that position was the definition of Travellers as persons of "*no fixed abode*" who "*habitually wandered from place to place*". In other words Travellers were defined in relation to a sedentary way of life and in the ethnocentric terms of the dominant culture i.e. nomadism was equated with vagrancy and analysed as the "*problem of itinerancy*". The designation "*itinerant*" was used despite the fact that it was unacceptable to Travellers who preferred to call themselves Travellers. A pathological view of Travellers permeated the Report as can be seen in its focus on their deprivation and maladaption to the existing social order rather than on the prejudices of the dominant population and its power structures. For example, the Report described the social and ethical behaviour of Travellers, particularly their tendency to remain aloof from the majority population, their lack of respect for the law, disinterest in exercising franchise, failure to register births, deaths and marriages and their disregard for the property rights of others. The central recommendation of the Report was to solve the "*problem of itinerancy*" through the absorption and rehabilitation of Travellers into settled society. The housing

of Travellers was therefore presented as the main objective. The key agents in this process were seen to be social workers and teachers. Social workers employed by the state were given the task of assisting individual families who had problems adjusting to a settled way of life. Teachers likewise were given the task of assimilating Traveller children into the school system. *"It is urgently necessary, both as a means of providing opportunities for a better way of life and of promoting their absorption into the settled community ... to ensure that as many itinerant children as possible may from now on receive an adequate elementary education."* (Report, p.67). Here also the focus was on the Travellers as the problem and no attention was given to the nature of schooling, the curriculum or the attitude of the teachers.

In addition to social work and teaching, community development was added as another mechanism for facilitating the absorption of Travellers. *"Settlement of travelling people is a first necessary step towards their social progress and ultimate integration. Settlement on its own is not sufficient and must be supported by a suitable programme of education, social work and community development."* (Quoted in The Irish Itinerants: some demographic, economic and educational aspects, ESRI, 1979, p.40). Obviously the understanding of community development here is similar to the traditional UN. definition referred to earlier in this paper, i.e. it assumes consensus between all parties concerned.

Having analysed the problem in the manner outlined above and having presented a set of solutions based on this analysis the Irish state then did little else. This neglect showed that there was no real commitment to responding to Travellers' needs even in the terms set out. It was left to the voluntary sector to get on with the task of implementing the recommendations made. It is not surprising that voluntary groups did emerge and respond to the needs of Travellers because Ireland has a very strong tradition of voluntary work. Much of this derives from the influence of Roman Catholicism and its emphasis on works of mercy towards the poor and deprived. Voluntary groups became interested in the problems of Travellers and in 1965 the Dublin Itinerant Settlement Committee was formed. By 1969 an Irish Council for Itinerant Settlement could be formed from settlement committees throughout Ireland. (In 1973 this name was changed to the National Council for Travelling People). In 1972 the Council appointed a national co-ordinator for the rehabilitation and housing of Travellers. All these voluntary groups accepted the stated project of the state in relation to Travellers and also operated on that assumption that all parties involved, including Travellers, were pursuing common interests.

When it was obvious that Travellers' practice often conflicted with this presumed consensus the voluntary sector consoled itself that consultation was being carried out. The divergence between Travellers' replies to questions and their actual practice served merely to reinforce negative stereotypes of Travellers. What many voluntary groups failed to recognise was that the consultation which took place was conducted within a framework preconceived by settled people. For example Travellers who opted for houses and then left them shortly afterwards were seen as failing and the settlement programme remained unchallenged. *"Sometimes, those families who do not succeed in settling the first time will come back later and try again; and perhaps the next time they will succeed"*. (From a report by the national co-ordinator for Itinerant Settlement, in Travelling People, ed. V. Bewley, 1974).

In 1974 the Council appointed a National Co-ordinator for the education of Travellers. In the same year the first Travellers' training centre opened. By 1976 the Council could form a National Association of Training Centres. Personal development of the individual young Traveller was the aim of these centres. They sought to combine religious and moral education with the acquiring of skills, trades and crafts. They responded to the Travellers' *"need to be prepared for employment, not only by the acquiring of skills and trades, but by learning punctuality, regularity, reliability"* (cf. Keane, H., National Council for Travelling People, 1969-1985). Progress in education was measured to a great extent by the increase in attendance in schools and in the acquisition of values appropriate for incorporation into the system of waged labour.

Youth work with Travellers was also pioneered by the Dublin Committee of the National Council in the early 70s. The focus of this work was the provision of leisure activities for young Travellers. Again this work was tied to the central project of assimilation. One publication describes the *"community centres on sites where all kinds of social and cultural activities are provided by voluntary workers for the families to help them learn the ways of settled living"*. (About our Travelling People, NCTP).

This work was impressive for the energy and goodwill involved to develop such a wide-ranging voluntary infrastructure. The core workers were drawn from religious orders and from the upper echelons of society. A Christian ethos informed the work. Central to this ethos were the concepts of voluntarism and charity. Both can be problematic. Voluntarism in that it stresses the need for goodwill rather than qualifications to do the job and in that it leaves the question of accountability too vague. Charity in that it emphasises doing

things for people rather than with people. Charity tends to ensure that the powerful retain their power, it all too often breeds a destructive dependency.

What all of this clearly shows is that from the 1960s onwards the project of the state in relation to Travellers as outlined above was supported by and large by the voluntary sector. There were however a few notable exceptions to this but these were unable to alter the overall direction of the work. It is not possible to examine these other initiatives here, however we wish to refer briefly to one of the most significant of these. This was the emergence of an all-Traveller group called "Minceir Misli" in the early 80s. This group was very successful in highlighting the discrimination towards Travellers and exposed the falseness of the consensus model by engaging in protests and campaigns for Travellers' rights. The group met with a lot of resistance and opposition because of its criticism of mainstream work for Travellers and the threat it posed for many. It was unable to sustain its momentum because of lack of resources as well as its inability to widen its membership beyond a few Traveller families.

By the 1980s the situation of Travellers was such that the state felt obliged to make another intervention similar to the first. A Government Review Body was established in 1981 to examine social policies and services for Travellers and to make recommendations based on this. The findings were published in a report in 1983 and this provided the basis for statutory and voluntary action since then. The second Report replaced the concept "absorption" with that of "integration". It also abandoned the term itinerant and opted instead for Traveller. Nevertheless it still supported the central policy of assimilation although its tone was more libertarian than that of the 1963 Report. This libertarianism was evident in the way it stressed individual decision-making as opposed to a collective response. For example, "... the extent to which they (Travellers) will integrate with the settled community will depend on individual decisions by them and not on decisions by Travellers as a whole or any grouping of them" (p.60). This focus on the individual informs the whole document and the policy recommendations which it makes.

Against this background DTEDG was formed in order to provide an alternative model which could respond effectively to the needs of Travellers and the new challenges that were emerging. Its starting point was that the types of action being followed — based on the prevailing perceptions of Travellers i.e. related to social pathology, culture of poverty and occasionally romantic notions which regarded Travellers as exotic — were inadequate and needed to be replaced with an acknowledgement of Travellers' cultural identity as an

ethnic group. Nomadism was seen not as an aberration but as an element in that cultural identity. Secondly, it analysed much of the treatment of Travellers as racist and on the basis of this set out to develop an anti-racist programme to deal with it. Thirdly it acknowledged Travellers' right to self-determination as a key ingredient in any long-term solution to the problems faced by Travellers. This contrasted with the charity model referred to earlier which viewed Travellers as victims in need of assistance and focused instead on Travellers as an oppressed group in need of support in their struggle for acceptance as equals. On the basis of this analysis community work was seen as the most appropriate method of intervention. We will now examine how this has been implemented in practice.

SECTION THREE

A Community Work Case Study

In this final section we wish to describe the work of the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group. We do so to draw out the consequences of a conscious application of community work principles. It is important to stress that community work is not the solution to the problems of the Travellers in Ireland. It is however making a contribution to such a solution by creating a climate within which change can take place at the same time as building a force capable of taking advantage of this new climate. Inevitably this is a slow process.

In July of this year 150 Travellers and settled people spent a week marching eighty four miles across Ireland to a holy well shrine in Sligo. The DTEDG was one of the instigators of this pilgrimage which was modelled on a traditional Traveller expression of religious belief. The pilgrimage ended with a night long vigil at the shrine during which the different groups there made dramatic presentations. The central themes running through these were the discrimination faced by Travellers, the oppression of Traveller women, and the celebration of the nomadic culture of the Travellers. Here was a quality of Traveller involvement manifested that is far from the legal basis to the social work relationship.

This was the second such pilgrimage and the idea grew directly from a listening survey within the Traveller community. The immediate interest of the Travellers in such popular forms of religion was clearly expressed in this

survey. The pilgrimage idea grew from seeking to pursue this interest within a broader strategic analysis of the Traveller situation. A pilgrimage could be both a statement of religious faith and a powerful political statement of the Travellers right to travel. It was this latter aspect that dominated widespread media coverage as well as much of the conversation along the route. A pilgrimage could provide a vital forum for Travellers to network and to reflect on their situation — two elements central to the empowerment of the Travellers. Networking has particular importance in a phase where nomadism is increasingly restricted and where there is a growing need for solidarity within the Traveller community to address divisions there.

This was one of the most recent involvement's of the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group, a group formed in 1983 committed to pursuing community work actions as a response to the situation of the Travellers. The work of the group is shaped by its recognition of the ethnic identity and separate nomadic culture of the Travellers. It is suggested that this is the only basis for any meaningful work with the Travellers. The analysis of the group is continuously developing. Initially this was progressed in dialogue with spokespeople from within the Traveller community. Time and commitment to the principle of participation have seen the group develop from this into a partnership arrangement made up of Travellers and settled people.

DTEDG programmes include training, enterprise development, work with Traveller women, direct youth and community work programmes, and work with settled people. In this we aim to resource the Travellers in their struggle for self determination at the same time as working to challenge the racism in Irish society that is the root cause of the problems faced by the Travellers. This is a position of solidarity in a situation of conflict. The DTEDG is not neutral in this conflict nor external to it. Our analysis of racism focuses centrally on the institutions of the Irish state and the organisations within Irish settled society.

Last year the DTEDG played an important role in a successful campaign to have Travellers named in the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Bill — the first piece of anti-discrimination legislation in Ireland. This campaign involved a high media profile, meetings with key parliamentarians, protests, and the development of alliances with other groups affected by this bill — in particular groups promoting rights for lesbians and gay men and for black people. Active involvement from Travellers in street protests, media coverage, and meetings was a feature of this campaign.

The media has been a key focus for our work in challenging racism. The pursuit of a high media profile and work with individual journalists has resulted in the Traveller situation increasingly being debated in terms of ethnicity and racism as opposed to settlement and poverty. It has also meant Travellers gaining access to the media to articulate their perspective.

Time and energy has also been devoted to providing anti-racist training and to developing the seeds for an anti-racist movement through making alliances with trade unions, community groups, women's groups, and other human rights groups. There is a constant tension in all this work. In a situation of scarce resources it is all too easy for this pursuit of root causes to neglect the need for broader Traveller involvement by relying on the contributions of a small group of articulate and highly aware Travellers. The need for occasions such as the pilgrimage is evident if, in generating the climate for change, we are also to enable Travellers to exploit this climate.

As such the way that we approach any task can be as important as the task itself. Levels of involvement in the task and the quality of participation are crucial in a relationship that is entirely voluntary and without legal back up. They are of particular importance of course in a group that is promoting intercultural relations based on equity and justice.

This is an issue within the DTEDG itself. The nature of the partnership we represent is a subject of constant scrutiny. We examine how the power relations between Travellers and settled people are manifested in what we do and in how we make decisions. This is done through weekly staff meetings and monthly management meetings and is by no means easy or resolved. There is a constant tension between trying to function efficiently and effectively while at the same time trying to promote participation and involvement. It is however central to our ongoing analysis and reflection on the broader situation.

The partnership nature of the group took a qualitative step forward with our employment three years ago of three Travellers to provide a youth and community work service within the Traveller community. This was an overt expression of our belief in the need for Travellers to be the active agents in the transformation of their own situation. In this area of work the DTEDG has sought to:-

1. provide a service on a number of sites by organising activities such as summer projects for Traveller children, sporting activities, bingo nights,

and other such like.

2. provide a focus for mobilising Travellers around issues of concern such as the campaign developed by one of the workers against the racist and segregated nature of supplementary social welfare provision for Travellers in Dublin.

3. provide a mechanism to ensure other organisations, in the area where the workers are operating, include the Travellers in what they provide and do so in a culturally appropriate manner.

The training and educational work being done by the group is an essential pre-requisite for this to happen. The three Travellers employed participated in a DTEDG training programmes. Just as important, many of the Travellers they are working with have also participated in the training. The training provides an opportunity to reflect on their own situation and its causes so as to develop appropriate responses. It also allows for the exploration of new concepts which are crucial to this phase of the Traveller struggle — new concepts such as community work, ethnicity, and racism in particular.

The training is provided through state schemes on which a trainee allowance is paid. This can cause problems whereby political activity comes to be seen as a paid activity and therefore only to be engaged in on that basis. There are also tensions in ensuring the training is a form of intercultural dialogue and that it does not degenerate into the imposition of settled peoples' values. This is particularly sensitive in a situation where Travellers are being encouraged and facilitated to pursue new forms of struggle that demand new tactics and new forms of leadership.

Travellers taking up community work roles within their own community face grave difficulties. Their training is minimal. They face the expectations of their own community bred on a social work welfare model designed to provide solutions for their individual problems. They face the expectations of the state that sees them as having an inside track to controlling their own people. They can also often face the hostility of other settled professionals who are threatened by what they perceive as competition. One local authority official contacted the DTEDG enraged that one of the community workers had suggested to the Travellers on the site where he was working that the site had much in common with a prison. Subsequently the same official, supported by the local social worker, withdrew support from this worker and invited

another settled organisation to provide a service on the site.

The dangers of tokenism and of unrealisable expectations are great. It is important that Travellers take on these roles. Equally it is important that they are given adequate support to fill them. The partnership model developed within the overall group has particular relevance to this area of our work. The most effective actions developed by the group have been where Traveller and settled colleagues have pursued initiatives in partnership.

Both however must beware of approaching the Traveller community as homogenous. There are divisions — between rich and poor, old and young, sedentary and nomadic, men and women. In a situation of crisis, in which the Traveller culture finds itself, these divisions can be highly conflictual. A specific programme of work has been developed by the DTEDG with Traveller women. This has served as a model for a large number of groups working with Travellers — an aspect that has always been of interest to us in developing new initiatives.

Training programmes have been run for Traveller women that allow for reflection on their experience as Travellers and as women and that facilitate them in taking some actions related to this reflection. Enterprise ideas are being pursued for Traveller women. Five women are now managing and running a laundry service on one site. The importance of such an enterprise lies in its role as providing a focus around which the women can organise and be in a position from which they are able to contribute to the broader struggle.

The DTEDG has also played a key role in bringing a number of organisations together to promote a national Traveller women's forum. A steering group of Traveller and settled women meet on a regular basis to organise the forum. The forum first met in November 1988 bringing together over 150 Traveller and settled women working with Travellers, from all over the country. It has met five times since then exploring issues such as ethnicity, culture, accommodation, women's health, creativity, and fire safety.

There are many levels on which the operation of the forum contributes. It seeks firstly to be an enjoyable experience for the women but to progress from this to being a tool for change. It provides a basis for Traveller women to be together and to reflect on their situation — and for settled women working with Travellers to be together and to reflect on the nature and quality of their work. Most important, it manages to avoid the rigid structures rooted in the

representative democratic traditions of settled society in the West, while at the same time providing a national platform for Travellers women to develop actions to address their situation and to articulate a united perspective on this situation. It also provides a basis for Traveller women to pursue more equitable alliances with the organisations of settled women.

The DTEDG's enterprise programme mentioned above has been particularly integrated into the women's programme but it does have a broader remit. Part of the crisis in the Traveller culture is related to the crisis in the Traveller economy. With old trades and economic activities such as tinsmithing now redundant there is widescale dependence on social welfare within the Traveller community. There has been no state intervention that seeks to regenerate a Traveller economy, with initiatives confined to attempting to draw Travellers into the settled working class. As stated above our enterprise programme seeks to provide bases around which Travellers can organise. It also seeks to pilot culturally appropriate models of economic development within the Traveller community.

In our enterprise programme, as in many of our programmes, we have sought to develop pilot models which can be used to resource other groups working with Travellers, to impact on policy makers, and to facilitate Travellers testing out new ways of organising. To date we have developed two such enterprises — the laundry referred to above and the Travellers Resource Warehouse which is a waste recycling business. This latter project has a particular relevance given the numbers of Travellers involved in waste recycling activities at a subsistence level. Both are all Traveller enterprises and are unique in incorporating some of the values traditionally associated with Traveller economic activities. However they are both caught in a contradiction being based on waged labour. This is a requirement for access to state grants and yet it has never been a feature of the Traveller economy.

The use of pilot models to impact on policy has been a feature of our work. As the context within which we work changes we have approached the area of policy making with greater confidence. Most recently we have been involved in the writing of an accommodation policy for Travellers that respects their nomadic traditions and way of life, and in initiating a campaign around this policy. A number of settled people and Travellers came together from different organisations around the country to write this policy. The umbrella of the Traveller subgroup of a national body called the National Campaign for the Homeless is now being used to pursue a campaign around this policy.

There are three areas in which we wish to further develop this work over the next five years:-

1. We have been selected as an innovatory measure within the Third European Combat Poverty Programme. We hope to exploit this in two ways. We are working to develop alliances at a European level with Gypsy and Traveller groups. We also have begun to look at ways of using European institutions to impact on policy making at a national level. Aspirations to an intercultural Europe have been expressed at a European level that have yet to impact at a national level in Ireland and elsewhere.

2. We are developing a resource to facilitate Travellers in exploring their history and culture, and in so doing, charting new expressions of their culture. The development of what is called an Eco-Museum and a cultural heritage centre is already greatly advanced with the purchase and development of a large premises in Dublin.

3. We plan to deepen our role as a catalyst organisation forming alliances around issues and resourcing groups forming to take up issues related to our work and aims. In particular we will pursue the implications of Traveller ethnicity now that it is being increasingly accepted in Irish society. This will be a process of piloting intercultural models and developing new policies in a process of intercultural dialogue.

Conclusion

Community work models have much to offer to work with Travellers and Gypsies provided they operate out of the principles that we have described — of empowerment, self-determination, and justice. In themselves they cannot and do not solve all the problems faced by Travellers and Gypsies in today's racist and sexist world, but in the current vacuum where the old assimilationist methods have failed, even in their own terms, community work provides a new, exciting, and possibly non oppressive way forward.

There is a danger in this that there will merely be a transformation of language and rhetoric with practice continuing to follow the old failed logic. Central to the task now in front of us is the work to create the conditions for community work models to be pursued. This will inevitably involve an infusion of new personnel into this area and the development of new training forms appropriate to the analysis and direction of these models.

This moment is important. Real problems were identified in the past such as the lack of accommodation. However they were defined at the level of the symptom and in settled peoples' terms. If we are to take advantage of this moment we must not only examine and correct our practice but also our analysis. This will involve developing our knowledge of the theory and reality of racism in our society and in ourselves.

To develop the work at a European level and to communicate at this level we need to all agree about what we are talking about. This is vital if we are to avoid deflection into false problems and irrelevant debates. We invite participants to work with us in devising and disseminating an agreed glossary of terms.

We must beware of falling into the trap of a community pathology model. We need to look for real not consensual partnership with the state. This can only come about if the state shifts its position. We must concentrate our efforts to ensure that this can happen.

We must work to overcome the dualism that exists in relation to policy and practice. If community work is to be effective it must play a central role in influencing policy. In this way it becomes a holistic and integrated approach. This requires community work practitioners and target groups to have a real role in policy elaboration. This can only come about if the elitism within academic and bureaucratic circles is challenged. Constant examination of power relationships is demanded.

We hope that this paper has been of interest to you and that it will be a stimulant for discussion that will deepen and develop its content. We look forward to your questions, criticisms, and comments both in terms of the work for this week and in terms of provoking us to further reflection on our model.

Recycling and the Traveller Economy

by Niall Crowley and Mary Bridgid Collins

Introduction

This is an important opportunity to celebrate the Travellers' contribution to the environment and to the economy - a contribution that is so often denied and hidden behind a range of anti-Traveller stereotypes. Travellers were recycling long before Greens were Greens, they could rightfully claim to be Ireland's first Greens. Older Travellers talk of collecting porter bottles off the dumps, washing them in the river and selling them back to the pubs for a penny. The recycling of metals has always been a central part of the Traveller economy. The skill of tinsmithing, so important in extending the life of metalware, has been dominated by Travellers.

In this paper we wish to start by exploring a pilot initiative in supporting Travellers' recycling initiatives. We then wish to put this in the broader context of the Traveller economy by setting out the role of recycling in this economy, looking at the way this work is organised and examining the response of the state to these initiatives. Finally we wish to outline some concrete suggestions to ensure that Travellers can continue to contribute to a greener, cleaner Ireland. There is a welcome and growing environmental consciousness in Ireland. This is slowly translating into concrete actions. However there is a danger that this welcome change could actually end up marginalising Travellers' role in the recycling arena. This will inevitably happen unless there is a conscious commitment to naming Travellers as active participants in the recycling business and to resourcing their particular role in this arena in a manner that respects their distinct culture and way of life.

Traveller Resource Warehouse

Pavee Point is an-old church in Dublin's north inner city. It is listed by Dublin Corporation for conservation. In April of this year it was officially opened by the Taoiseach as the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group's headquarters. He congratulated the group on the work of transforming the

building to its new use — a bit of recycling — by the group that won first prize in the Ford European Conservation Awards!

Pavee Point accommodates the training and youth work activities of the DTEDG. It is gradually being developed as a Traveller culture/heritage centre - a place where Travellers can come to learn about and celebrate their past, their artistic achievements and their way of life. This is not out of nostalgia but out of a commitment to support Travellers in building a future that flows from this past and that respects Travellers' unique identity. Pavee Point also accommodates the Travellers Resource Warehouse, a recycling enterprise set up by three Travellers in March 1989.

Wandering through the Travellers Resource Warehouse you will find rolls of lace, fabrics of all shapes, sizes and types, shelves loaded down with paper, boxes full of plastic bottles, plastic cones, and cardboard, tubes. You will find tiles, African grass, wool, timber, zips, egg boxes, rolls of newsprint, wallpaper and much more besides. Rubbish to some, these treasures have all been saved from the dump. We collect all this material from businesses around the Dublin area - they are end of line stock, off-cuts, rejects or the product of warehouse clearance.

The Travellers Resource Warehouse operates a membership system. Members pay an annual subscription and in return have unlimited and free access to all the materials collected. They include schools, youth groups, community workshops, drama groups, womens groups. Over one hundred groups now collect materials for their arts and crafts activities from the TRW - there are days in there when it is like working in a supermarket.

The Travellers Resource Warehouse is rooted in the long tradition of recycling within the Traveller community. It has three aims. Obviously the first is to provide employment for Travellers. The second is to resource the creative arts at a community level and to contribute to better waste management. The final aim is to use the initiative as a base for highlighting Travellers' involvement in recycling and for encouraging debate as to how Travellers can continue to play this role.

In terms of employment, we are still up and running and into our third year. This has been no mean achievement. The first two years we received a gradually reducing commercial aid grant from FAS. In this third year FAS support is not available. However we still depend on hidden subsidies from

the DTEDG and on a number of other small grants. There is a message in this. Recycling enterprises will take time to become self sustaining and there needs to be a support system based on the notion of sustaining jobs rather than demanding viability in the first two years. Recycling is still not a profitable business - hence the absence of private sector involvement. However given the social contribution of these enterprises there should be long term support to the community sector to encourage their involvement in them.

We also came up against some surprising barriers. The first was a lack of premises. To date we have been in three premises - it was some relief to finally come to rest in Pavee Point. The right space at the right rent was just not available. The worst barrier though was our difficulty in getting insurance for our van. As soon as the word Traveller entered the conversation brokers and insurance companies came up with a range of excuses for refusing to quote. It took a sympathetic broker, who initially was not aware what the T stood for in TRW, to resolve this problem. We later found out that some insurance companies actually name Travellers as an unacceptable risk, others are more subtle about it but the end result is the same.

Over one hundred groups using the materials and the many tonnes of material that pass through the warehouse indicate some success in our second aim. It has been difficult to sell the concept to groups that are used to neatly packaged materials off a shelf. It has taken time to convince groups all suffering from restricted financial circumstances to take the risk and invest in the new venture. Seeing is believing and our strategy has been based on organising a series of events to get people into the warehouse - open days, book launches, and craft seminars have all been tried and continue to be our best marketing strategy.

The end product is that over one hundred groups, and this number is growing, are encouraged to use recycled goods and to re-examine their attitudes not only to waste but also to the Traveller community. Further proof positive of our work in promoting Travellers' role in recycling is our presence here at this conference. First place in the 1989 Resource Ireland Awards sponsored by An Taisce and receiving an Environmental Awareness Award from the Department of the Environment also contributed to this agenda. However, in this work we are concerned not just to integrate Travellers into recycling projects but to have Travellers written into any recycling policy in a manner that respects and recognises their distinct culture and the distinct features of the Traveller economy.

The Travellers Resource warehouse seeks to model out how this might usefully happen. We work on a co-operative basis in what is an all Traveller enterprise - in an essentially Traveller environment within Pavee Point. In this way we set out to recreate some of the elements and values that inform the Traveller economy. However it is by no means a perfect model given that it is based on waged labour - a method of organisation that is not a feature of the Traveller economy.

The Traveller Economy

Previously the Travellers were a rural people with a nomadic existence based on a range of economic activities. These included recycling, tinsmithing, seasonal labour on the farms, chimney sweeping, flower making and door to door sales among other activities. However the introduction of plastics, the development of the rural areas, and the exodus from these areas destroyed this economic base of the Traveller community.

The Travellers responded to this economic crisis by moving to the cities. Economic activity is now concentrated in the area of trading and in waste recycling. Other activities include door to door services, tarmacadam laying, and seasonal farm labour. However the crisis remains with over 90% of Travellers dependent on social welfare.

As an urban people the Travellers have maintained their nomadic lifestyle in the face of many restrictions. This nomadism takes a range of forms from those who are nomadic throughout the year, to those who move out from a fixed base for certain periods in the year, to those who are sedentary for many years and then move on. It is important to note that most of those few Travellers that have accumulated some wealth are engaged in trading and are the most nomadic of the group. Nomadism plays a key role in searching out and providing for new markets. The Traveller way of life remains viable, despite the many assertions to the contrary.

Some Travellers have accumulated wealth in the recycling business though most are engaged at a subsistence level. The range of activities is broad. Examples include house to house collections of old furniture and clothes for resale in the markets, waste metal recycling off the city's tipheads, and scrapping old cars for their spare parts. Often this work is dangerous and unhygienic. Often it is carried out in the face of direct opposition from the local authorities. In this there are echoes of John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath where he describes a scenario thus:-

> *"The people come with nets to fish for potatoes in the river and the guards hold them back; they come in rattling cars to get the dumped oranges but the kerosene is sprayed on the fruit. And they stand still and watch the potatoes float by, listen to the screaming pigs being killed in a ditch and covered in quicklime, watch the mountains of oranges slop down to a putrefying ooze; and in the eyes of the people there is a failure; in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath."*

However if the Traveller economy is to be properly resourced and regenerated it is also important to look beyond exactly what Travellers do to earn money and to look at how Travellers actually organise their income generating activities. Study of the Traveller economy down through the years would show that, although the income generating activities have changed, the principles and values around which they have been organised have remained constant. Any initiative to address the crisis in the Traveller economy must be based on a respect for these principles if it is to have any chance of making an impact.

A number of such elements stand out:-

MOBILITY. Nomadism plays many roles and takes many forms within the Traveller community. It plays social and psychological roles but the central role has always been and still is economic. Nomadism in its different forms has allowed Travellers access to a market big enough to ensure that marginal activities being pursued can become viable. Mobility as an imperative has also meant that Travellers have avoided engaging in activities requiring large capital expenditure, as plant and heavy equipment would restrict access to the market by restricting mobility.

FLEXIBILITY. The Travellers have retained the ability to switch out of unprofitable activities, into areas that are more remunerative, at great speed. Prizing the attribute of flexibility has meant that the Travellers have not specialized in their skills and activities in the manner that the settled population have in pursuit of economic gain. Skills that are prioritized within the Traveller economy are those that can be applied to a range of different activities.

SELF EMPLOYMENT. This appears as an over-riding concern within the Traveller economy. Although Travellers have moved in and out of paid employment as circumstances demanded, waged labour is not a feature of the Traveller economy. Income is generated on the basis of payment per item provided in what is essentially a service economy. Self employment also means that Travellers tend not to work within the boss-worker relationship - especially where the boss is a settled person. This has meant that the priorities and values dominant within the Traveller culture can be respected by the Travellers without conflict. It has also meant that there is no separation within the Traveller culture between living and working space. This is a key element that is all too often ignored in statutory provision for the Travellers.

Given the nature of the culture difference we outline, between settled people and Travellers, there is a clear danger that any recycling policy or any job creation policy that does not specifically name Travellers and their particular needs will actually end up excluding them. This has been the experience to date. Even to concentrate on the concept of job creation is ethnocentric and does not allow for an economy based on income generating activities. If statutory provision is to be relevant to the Travellers then it must be based on a respect for the Traveller way of life. This must not happen in a manner that ends up in a scenario where settled people who are policy makers define the Traveller way of life and impose it on the Travellers. The Travellers must be active participants in elaborating this policy and any policy made should be based on allowing Travellers a real choice as to how they wish to engage in economic activity.

Statutory Response

This does not happen at local, national or E.C. level. The state far from encouraging the Traveller economy actually, wittingly or unwittingly, ends up actively discouraging it. Travellers engagement in recycling is despite statutory intervention not because of it. This is a contradiction that needs to be rectified.

Last July the Kerryman newspaper reported the proposed Traveller halting site at Deer Park in Killarney under the headline *"Strict Screening for Halting Site Families"*. The paper quoted the local social worker who stated:-

"We will not allow the collection of scrap. If this is not to the liking of the Travellers then too bad - there are going to be rules and they are going to be rigidly enforced".

This social worker also revealed that the families for the site will be selected by the manager of Kerry County Council on his recommendation and that the Travellers he was *"actively considering don't want scrap"*.

Travellers that engage in recycling will be punished by eviction from the new site - that is if they even manage to get onto it in the first place given the selection procedure that is designed to ensure that those engaged in such activities remain, without basic facilities, on the side of the road. This goes contrary to any statutory commitment to encourage recycling and it is a direct attack on the Travellers' economic base. Strange too to have such economic activities outlawed at a time of mass unemployment.

Kerry is not alone in this. Local authorities throughout the country are actively discouraging Travellers' contribution to recycling. In Cork Travellers moving onto a new site were obliged to sign a contract prohibiting them from collecting scrap. In Dublin the County Council declared that all scrap cars on Traveller sites were illegally parked and signed a contract with a scrap merchant to forcibly remove them. When challenged on this they said they *"were not the IDA"* and that they had no responsibility to support the Traveller economy — surely a sad comment on the lack of integration in statutory provision.

Nomadism too is outlawed by local authorities that refuse to provide transient short stay sites and that place boulders on any potential camping spots. Prohibition orders are made by local authorities to prevent any Travellers moving into an area where a new site has been built. Invidious distinctions are made between "our Travellers" and "transients". All this also serves to undermine the Traveller economy and to ensure permanent dependence by this community on the social welfare system.

At a national level there is no initiative to which local authorities could look to as a challenge to do thing differently. There is the 1988 Housing Act which effectively acknowledges Travellers' ethnic identity by tracing out their distinct needs in housing. This sort of legislation is however also required in the area of economic activity if Travellers' role in recycling is to be secured.

There is a growing awareness at present at national level in relation to the distinct needs of Travellers. At the last Fianna Fail ard-fheis the Taoiseach stated that:-

"Local authorities throughout the country will be called upon to take special urgent action in this anniversary year to meet the needs of all Travellers within their area. And we should respect the culture of our Travelling community and develop a better public understanding of their time-honoured way of life".

However this has yet to be translated into policy and into action at national or local level.

At a national level the policy remains based on a desire to incorporate Travellers into a working class ethos. Much emphasis is placed on working *"to fit Travellers for regular employment"* in the words of the Government Travelling People Review Body that reported in February 1983. In writing about employment of Travellers the committee concluded that:-

"the traditional self employed occupations of Travellers should be encouraged. Even though many of the skills involved belong to another era, consideration should be given to the adaptation of such skills for use in modern light industrial employment".

The central point was missed and a course was charted based on assimilating the Travellers into the settled way of life rather than respecting difference and resourcing their way of life on their terms. The committee chose to focus on the tangible, on what Travellers do to earn a living. However if a culture and a way of life is to be respected it is important to look to the intangible - to the area of values. In other words it would have served Travellers better if the committee had focused on how Travellers organise their economy.

The result is a policy vacuum with no statutory position laid out in relation to the Traveller economy. This has ended up in a situation where Traveller economic activity is being suppressed. At an E.C. level the situation is no better. Policies that relate to minority ethnic groups within the community have yet to reflect the needs of nomadic groups' economic activities. The experience of the Travellers in Ireland is repeated throughout Europe with policy focusing on the "integration of minorities into the labour force". Again this sort of terminology ensures that policy is not based on the values that inform a nomad's economy.

The Future

The scenario that we have described is depressing and yet the present situation does hold some promise. There is evidence of a new analysis of Travellers at national level among politicians. There is also a sense that previous efforts to solve the problems of Travellers have failed and that new thinking and new initiatives are required. Side by side with this growing and new awareness of the Travellers is a similar process in relation to the environment and the management of waste. What we need is a fusion of these two trends to rebuild a vibrant Traveller economy.

There is a need for creativity and for imagination - for letting go of old and hard certainties. A new field needs to be explored - that of interculturalism, where cultural diversity is respected and resourced and where the threat of racism is acknowledged. We wish to finish by highlighting some concrete proposals for action at local and national levels. We do so in the knowledge that these represent merely a start in this new process.

1. At local level there needs to be a new look taken at the design of Traveller halting sites. In particular they must be designed in a manner that respects that within the Traveller culture the living and working space are seen as one and the same. Provision must be made on the sites for the recycling initiatives of Travellers. In this way the Travellers can continue to contribute to better waste management without eyesores being created for lack of facilities.
    In this respect it is interesting to note that the 1983 Review Body Report did state that:-
    "Provision, by local authorities or businessses, of adequate space and appropriate facilities for scrap dealing or trading is recommended as a worthwhile approach to accommodating Travellers in pursuing their livelihood. Such facilities must be so arranged that they are not environmentally damaging or unsightly. Facilities such as small sheds close to the Traveller's accommodation would overcome this problem where light scrap is involved".
    The Traveller economy can be facilitated, the local concern with eyesores can be accommodated, and Travellers' engagement in recycling can be encouraged with just a little flexibility and creativity. Traveller sites need to be identified as an integral part of the local recycling chain - a series of recycling stations. Resources need to be allocated to ensure that this happens in a way that suits Travellers and that does not take away from the living environment on the sites.

2. At a national level there is a need to re-examine concepts that are used in relation to economic regeneration so as to ensure that a variety of ways of organising economic activity is allowed for and resourced in any policy. The social welfare system needs to be studied. At present it all too often ends up as a disincentive to those who seek to be financially independent by not recognising that such independence is not achieved within a week. We need a system that encourages and supports those engaged in creating new businesses and in seeking to shift from subsistence level activities to financial independence.

Waste management policy development needs to be monitored for its impact on the Traveller community given the nature of a Traveller economy and its roots in recycling. New techniques could marginalise the Travellers. This is not an argument against these new techniques but an argument to specifically include Travellers in the recycling possibilities that flow from these new techniques.

Conclusion

We hope that this paper is a contribution to encouraging a new vision of Travellers' engagement in recycling. We look forward to this new vision being translated into new realities for Travellers. However we emphasise the need for active Traveller participation in this process of translating vision into reality.

All sectors of Irish society have a role to play in redressing the situation of the Travellers. At present there is an urgent need to secure the visibility of Travellers within policy making and within statutory sector, private sector and voluntary sector activity in the area of recycling. Such visibility must be based on an understanding of the implications of the distinct culture and identity of the Travellers.

Racism and Participation:- The Case of the Irish Travellers

by Martin Collins

Introduction

The latest information that we have indicates that there are approximately 21,000 Travellers in Ireland, about 3,000 families. It is also estimated that there are a further 10,000 people of Irish Traveller descent in the United States of America. There are also approximately 15,000 Irish Travellers living in Britain.

The Travellers used to be a rural people moving around tinsmithing, doing seasonal jobs, and selling things door to door among other activities. Now the majority of travellers live in towns and cities with 25% in the Greater Dublin area. Different economic activities have been developed to replace what was traditionally done to make money. Many of these are in the area of recycling — scrap cars, door to door collections, metals off the dumps.

At the moment there are 1,136 Traveller families living on the side of the road on unofficial sites. We are forced to live in very primitive conditions without electricity supply, sanitation, or running water — all of the services that settled people take for granted. One of the major reasons for this is settled people rejecting the thought of having a Traveller halting site in their area.

"All council facilities, playing fields, leisure centres etc., should be closed to them. All shops in the area should refuse to serve them. Petrol stations should turn them away except for a fill up when they are leaving. Bars, pubs, and hotels should close their doors to them."

(Down Recorder, 25/7/86).

This quote is just an indication of how extreme the prejudice and hostility is towards Travellers. The sort of living conditions I describe obviously create serious health difficulties. The Health Research Board in their research found that *"Male Travellers have over twice the risk of dying in a given year than settled*

social welfare system, the education system prevents Travellers from being nomadic if they want an education. New ways of providing education need to be tried so that the system can resource the Travellers' way of life. Travellers should also be part of the curriculum. All children, Travellers and settled, need to learn about Travellers. The teachers need to be trained to ensure that this happens in an appropriate way, but this does not happen except for a few individuals in the system.

Travellers and participation

Travellers are not being allowed to have an input or make a contribution to policy making on issues that have an impact on them. It is settled people from one culture making policy for Travellers from another culture. I'm resentful of this. The policy makers are not properly advised, they don't have the knowledge or the analysis to make the proper policy for Travellers.

There are numerous obstacles that exist at the present time that are preventing Travellers from participating in the political system. These obstacles exist internally within the Traveller community and, of course, there are the external obstacles imposed by the settled society.

One of the internal difficulties that I have identified over the years is that Travellers, like most oppressed groups, are very fatalistic. They feel nothing can be done to improve their circumstances. This I believe is the product of years and years of conditioning from settled society. The church and religion have played a role in this. Religion can be a liberating force but it can also be a force to maintain the system as it is. The bible is often just used to justify our situation with parallels drawn between us and biblical characters so that we can console ourselves. Nowadays the role of religion and of the religious in the lives of Travellers is being questioned more. Officials and bureaucracy also promote fatalism. It takes so long just to change the smallest things that Travellers get fed up with the system.

Another internal difficulty is that Travellers tend to give settled people a lot of power and credibility even when it has not been earned. Again this is a result of the conditioning process which gets Travellers to think that settled society is superior to Traveller society. When Travellers manage to break out of this conditioning process and want to do something about the situation they are often stigmatised, slagged off and excluded because Travellers often believe that this is a job for settled people. This happens because Travellers' way of life

is constantly being diminished and insulted by settled people and settled institutions that do not respect our culture. Many policies are just there to wipe out our culture. Just think back to the education system that has nothing in it for Travellers and then imposes settled peoples' values.

Representative Democracy

There are many more direct obstacles that are put in the way of Travellers seeking to define their own future, by settled people. Firstly, going back to the education system, it in no way facilitates the notion of people participating in the political process.

My experience at primary level, even apart from the fact that Travellers never got a mention, was one where social analysis was not on the agenda. There was never any talk about Irish society, of the way power is held and about who makes the decisions or in whose interest decisions are made in Ireland. I wasn't even made aware of the basics — who were the political parties and how were they elected. Yet the school that I went to was always used for voting and counting votes which was a contradiction.

The opportunity for a Traveller member of the Dail is just not there. No Traveller is going to get elected. A Traveller candidate will not get settled people to vote for them because you would be going in to represent Travellers' interests and Traveller interests only. The Travellers voting power is small and fragmented. Travellers who are nomadic do not have a vote. The Traveller community is spread across so many constituencies that you could not get enough votes. This is by policy as well. Local authorities are now insisting that each electoral ward must take "its share" of Travellers. This is a racist notion anyway but it also ensures that there will never be a strong Traveller vote in any constituency.

One Dail deputy will make little impact. It might only raise peoples' expectations. It would however provide a platform to talk about Traveller issues. A Traveller T.D. would get better media coverage and would carry a little bit of weight. Electing one Traveller is no guarantee even of this as just because one is a Traveller doesn't guarantee that your analysis is correct or useful.

Participation is more important than this sort of representation. This could best start at local authority level. Advisory groups could be set up with status,

just like a special committee of the Dail. We would need to be sure the proper people were on these committees and that the Traveller participation was not tokenistic. Traveller groups and groups working within the Traveller community must pick their own participants. The state would only pick those that were convenient for them, those who wouldn't rock the boat.

New structures are required at all levels for Travellers to participate in making decisions on issues that effect them. This is the only way of ensuring that government policy does not involve racism — the imposition of the dominant culture on all. These new structures would need to operate in a more favourable context. There should be a comprehensive anti-discrimination law as well as official recognition of the Traveller ethnic identity and of the Travellers' right to have their culture and way of life resourced. Support must also be provided for strategies to address discrimination Travellers have faced over generations, and to develop the conditions for Traveller participation to be real and not just token.

Racism in Ireland – An Overview

by Niall Crowley

Denial

The recent European Parliament report from the Committee of Inquiry into Racism and Xenophobia recommended:-

"That the only member state which has not already signed the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination do so as soon as possible."(1)

That member state is Ireland. Ireland has no body of anti-racist legislation and is therefore not in a position to ratify this convention. The Committee of Inquiry failed to highlight the same absence of such legislation in Northern Ireland. These are the only regions of the E.C. without such legislation.

We deny that racism is a problem here. And yet the very terms of our denial are racist. Another section of the same report states that:-

> *"Ireland has a non E.C. population of only about 18000 and according to Patrick Cooney (MEP) the country has 'been remarkably free' of such problems as there is not a large presence of foreigners."*(1)

North and south, we identify the absence of black people as proof positive that racism is-not an Irish issue. This identifies black people as the problem - it's saying that it is the presence of black people that causes racism. This is a racist position. It is also inaccurate and denies the relevance of the experience of black people in Ireland which is one of racism. It also denies the potential of a homogenous society to be racist outwards in its relations with other societies. Irish emigrants have an invidious record of racism towards black communities. Irish Third World aid agencies have not only contributed to racist imagery of black people in their fundraising materials, but have also provided what end up at times being opportunities for white Irish people to practice their "white superiority" in aid programmes abroad.

This position also means that we can avoid looking at immigration policies that are designed to minimise the numbers of black people entering here.

British immigration law has, since the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, been - based on a strategy of controlling black immigration. William Deedes, a minister without portfolio at the time has written:-

"The (1962) Bill's real purpose was to restrict the influx of coloured immigrants. We were reluctant to say as much openly. So the restrictions were applied to coloured and white citizens in all Commonwealth countries - though everybody recognised that immigration from Canada, Australia and New Zealand formed no part of this problem."(2)

Later Acts in 1968 and 1971 were more overt. The 1968 Act specifically sought to control the entry of East African Asians. The 1971 Act contained overtly racial criteria for identifying who could stay and who could not. This legislation has set a trend where the size of the black population is defined as the problem — a trend that has spread throughout statutory provision from housing to education to employment. It has also generated a 'common sense' notion of the immigrant as black and a definition of nationality that is built around racial parameters.

In the south there have recently been a series of high profile cases involving deportation or incarceration of black refugees. Irish immigration legislation is minimal if draconian. The 1935 Aliens Act basically confers all power of decision to the Minister for Justice in relation to access without laying out any standards by which such powers should be exercised. Ireland has yet to ratify the U.N. Convention and the 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees.

Ethnicity

The same denial extends, north and south, to the Travellers, an indigenous minority ethnic group. Settled people, the dominant group, deny that Travellers are an ethnic group. The state defines policy that is based on identifying Travellers as a problem and in need of special support to assist them back into 'normal' society. This again is racist.

The 1963 Irish government Commission on Itinerancy captured this position when they stated:-

"While it is appreciated that difficulties and objections will be met in the early years from many members of the settled population, it is not considered that there is any

alternative to a positive drive for housing itinerants - if a permanent solution to THE PROBLEM OF ITINERANCY, based on absorbtion and integration is to be achieved."(3)

The Travellers and their way of life are defined as the problem, their disappearance through assimilation as the solution. While rhetoric has progressed, statutory practice, north and south, continues to reflect this analysis. We need look no further than designation policies and prohibition orders that set quotas in relation to the number of Travellers allowed to stay in any one area. A letter dated this year to a Traveller seeking to change address which was written by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive states:-

" At present the number of travelling families who are tenants in the .. estate exceed the agreed quota. Therefore until that number reduces we cannot agree this exchange."

Equally recently the officials in Dublin County Council proposed in relation to Traveller families:-

"to secure the return of all new families arriving in County Dublin and occupying roadside areas or sites on public land to the areas in which they have been normally resident."(4)

This is just another version of the repatriation threat that is hung over black communities. Dublin County Council and other local authorities around the country are also working to a site construction programme based on a quota system that sets a maximum number of families to be located in each electoral ward. Such practices define Travellers as a problem to be shared out. They are racist and they legitimise the racism of residents associations mobilizing to keep Travellers out of their areas.

This denial of Traveller ethnicity captures the centrality of power to any understanding of racism. The settled community have the power to name and label the Travellers. The Travellers are denied the basic right to name themselves.

No coherent argument has been put that disproves Travellers' claim to ethnicity. In fact many who deny this claim openly admit they are not clear what ethnicity is - "whatever it is Travellers are not it".

Ethnicity is about a collective sense of identity. It is a cultural and social phenomenon. Hilary Tovey in "Why Irish" writes that:-

> "Ethnicity is understood as a symbolic meaning system, a way for a 'people' to organise social reality in terms of their cultural similarities and differences."(5)

The House of Lords ruled that for a group to constitute an ethnic group in terms of the 1976 Race Relations Act it had to regard itself and be regarded by others as a distinct community. This distinctiveness was to be evident by virtue of a range of possible characteristics, the first two of which were essential:-

- A long shared history of which the group was conscious of.
- A cultural tradition of its own including family and social customs.
- Descent from common ancestors — you must be born into the group.
- A common language.
- A common religion.
- Being a minority or an oppressed or a dominant group within a larger community.

Clearly the Travellers fulfill all of these criteria. And yet the furthest that the state has gone is to recognise that Travellers have a different way of life that requires halting sites. Ethnicity is not conceded- and the distinct Traveller identity is not recognised or resourced.

Racialisation

This denial is rooted in the Irish experience of racism - we can see ourselves as victims but not so easily as oppressors. Irish people have been racialised on the basis of imagined biological differences and suffer racism based on this. The imagery used in describing Irish people in cartoons in some sections of the British media provide evidence of this - Irish people are depicted with ape like features. In 1982 a meeting of the Greater London Council went as far as to stop their advertising in the Standard due to an anti-Irish cartoon, which had, in the words of the Council chairperson:-

> "the clear message — that the Irish, as a race and as a community, are murderous mindless thugs."(6)

This is a tradition with long historical roots. In 1860 English historian Charles Kingsley wrote to his wife from Ireland:-

> "I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country .. to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one wouldn't see it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours."(6)

These examples are of particular interest in that they show a white skinned group being labelled as a 'race' on the basis of imagined biological difference. While the use and abuse of skin colour is the dominant feature in the process of 'race categorisation' it is not the only one, and in the absence of this difference other features — REAL OR IMAGINED — are used.

Putting 'race' labels on groups is called 'race categorisation'. It is a process that is central to the existence of racism. We acquire the habit of seeing the world in terms of different 'races'. We identify people with unchangeable characteristics based on their group membership. Travellers have "travelling in the blood", black people have "rhythm in their blood". We transform economic and cultural features into products of biology.

When we label a group as a 'race' it is important to point out what is involved. It involves a biological or pseudo-biological form of determinism whereby a group's culture and behaviour is deemed to be determined by biology. It engages us in the creation of a hierarchy of 'races' with some white Europeans at the top. It also justifies conflict between 'races' as inevitable and natural as it is based on the inherent negative characteristics associated with those deemed to be inferior 'races'.

This latter point is handy given that the self styled 'civilising' role adopted by those white Europeans at the top of the hierarchy has involved them in genocide, the use of slave labour and of forced labour, and continues to involve them in the exploitation and abuse of migrant labour.

'Race' and seeing ' the world in 'race' terms is very much part of our common sense. It is something we instinctively assume and never question. It comes as a shock to discover that it has no scientific basis and is no more than a myth constructed at an appropriate time to legitimise and structure the exploitation of what were deemed 'inferior races'.

UNESCO gathered many of the world's leading scientists after the Second World War to examine the concept. This was due to the holocaust where millions of Jews and Slavs, Poles and Gypsies were slaughtered on racial grounds - to ensure no degeneration of the superior Aryan 'race'. These scientists concluded that:-

"for all practical social purposes 'race' is not as much a biological phenomenon as a social myth. The myth of 'race' has created an enormous amount of human and social damage."(7)

We must stop seeing and interpreting our world in 'race' terms which focus on biological difference — and which rest on giving meaning to arbitrarily chosen physical features. We must take on board the concept of ethnicity with its focus on cultural difference, as a means of seeing and knowing our world. In such a scenario any legislation entitled "race relations" must be viewed with some suspicion as it incorporates and gives further legitimacy to a discredited concept that is at the root of racism.

New Racism

Racism as a set of ideas, beliefs and evaluations is not a static concept. With the discrediting of notions that give meaning to biological difference and of concepts of superiority/inferiority, racism develops new codes and new content to reflect the changing context.

Last year the Irish News quoted Stuart McCullough of the Ulster National Front. He stated:-

"Three and a half million Hong Kong Chinese hold British passports and certain quarters have suggested they should settle here. If that happened Ulster would cease to exist in a few short years. Our people would be a diminishing minority in our own motherland."

and,

"of course we would not want them here. They are not white, not European and not like us culturally and would pose a threat. At the same time we would be posing a threat to their own cultures and beliefs. For the maintenance of both races we would support their efforts to remain in their homeland."

92

The language of biology, of superiority, is largely gone underground. The new racism is occupying some of the ground won by those pursuing multi-cultural responses to racism. However it is a form of pseudo-biological culturalism whereby culture is defined incorrectly as non-negotiable and unchanging, and whereby culture becomes the determining factor for negative character-istics. The new racism also has a flawed biological basis in its assumption that it is human nature to want to be with 'one's own kind', and therefore to discriminate against those not of your group. There is little that is natural in this - it is something that we are taught — just like racism.

Individual Level

So we need to be wary of how culture is used in debate, policy making or practice. Culture must encompass everything a people think, do, and possess. It is something dynamic, rooted in the political and economic context. It must not be reduced to the tangible to the exclusion of the whole area of values and beliefs, nor must its dynamism be denied.

However I wish to highlight the racism of the National Front for a further reason. This is an example of racism at the level of the individual or interper-sonal. Other examples would include racist abuse and attacks experienced by minority ethnic groups north and south, or the recently unfolding saga of the Traveller site in Craigavon - again a story that could be told of most places north and south.

The Lurgan and Portadown Examiner quotes the Brownlow Forum protest group who:-

"cannot understand why the Council wants to build the sites, two of them between housing estates, when there is a push to generate the area. 'We realise travelling people have to go somewhere but we are looking for outside investors to come here and something like this will hold them back' a spokesperson said."

In another article one Brownlow Forum campaigner *"revealed that UDA members have told petition collectors 'we don't mind if the Travellers move in because we'll have a few bonfires and that'll scare them off'."*

Racism at this level, particularly in the more extreme forms quoted, tends to be more overt and conscious. It is very immediately frightening and horrify-

ing. However it is important to avoid the risk of racism being defined as a problem merely located in the individual.

Firstly this can reduce racism to the level of prejudice which encourages educational responses to promote what is ultimately a paternalistic interest in minority cultures and which ignores that this individual racism is the product of a political and economic context which involves relationships of domination and exploitation between groups. It also encourages a response promoting tolerance. Now one tolerates things that are basically unacceptable, so tolerance has little to do with equity or justice and is not a useful response to racism.

Secondly, in particular in its more extreme forms, it can let all the rest of us who are members of the dominant group off the hook, once we disown what the extremists are up to. We can then march on with a clear conscience. Again it comes as a shock to find out that nice people can also be racist - a situation that becomes evident when we examine racism at the institutional level.

Institutional Racism

It is only when we examine racism at the level of the institutions of a society that we can begin to come to grips with the complexity of the issue and begin to develop strategies that address the issue at its roots. Charles Husband defines institutional racism as occurring:-

"wherever individuals, in carrying out the routine practices of their employment or institutions, produce OUTCOMES which in their effect discriminate against members of ethnic minority populations."(8)

It is extremely difficult to deploy legislation adequate to protect minority ethnic groups against such racism. Racism at this level can be totally unconscious. It can be, and often is, based on the best of good intentions. It is insidious, covert and hard to pin down, and yet when we examine OUTCOMES in terms of the position of minority ethnic groups it is self evident.

Institutional racism highlights the role of power in the process of excluding groups. It demands that in seeking to be anti-racist that we focus our attention on societal structures and respected institutions, and in particular on areas and institutions where we as nice people hold some power and also play some role in generating racist outcomes.

With regard to outcomes there can be little doubt as to the nature of the exclusion experienced by the Travellers. The second annual report of the Director of Public Health, Eastern Health and Social Services Board stated:-

"Within Northern Ireland there is a group of people, half of whom live in the Eastern Board area, living in conditions that may be among the worst in the United Kingdom. These people are known as Travellers."

In January 1991 the Belfast Traveller Support Group highlighted that:-

"there are still approximately 186 out of the estimated total of 250 Travelling families living in illegal, unserviced roadside camps in Northern Ireland."

In the south the Health Research Board produced a report on the health status of the Travellers in 1987 which found that:-

"a male Traveller is twice as likely to die in a given year than a settled male, whereas for a female Traveller the risk is more than threefold."(9)

Institutional racism obliges us to examine the role of the state. North and south the Travellers are faced by a state that refuses to provide for nomadism and that blocks Traveller efforts at financial independence.

Accommodation provided for Travellers is based on a concept of settlement that is accompanied by a barrage of supervision from social workers, local authority administrators and site wardens. There is no provision to facilitate Traveller nomadism - halting sites are part of the settlement process not a resource for nomadism.

The nature of this failure is underlined when one refers to the Council of Europe report "Gypsies and Travellers" which was published in 1987. This report stated that:-

"The forced process of settling, frequently carried out under poor conditions, means less psychological, social and economic adaptability. When travel becomes just a dream, a long delayed dream for the Traveller, despair and its effects set in (illness, break up of the family, aggressiveness, and delinquency). The result is a crisis in the society of Gypsies and Travellers."(10)

Despite this public services are only made available to Travellers on condition that they settle. Social welfare requires Travellers to have an address - and still segregates and stigmatizes them. Education is only accessible for those who stop moving - and then in its content sets about instilling the values of the settled majority with no effort made to affirm or resource the Traveller identity. In particular the role of education in the assimilation of Travellers has been to fit them for 'regular employment' - to instill the values of 'regularity, punctuality and responsibility' in the words of one administrator.

Part and parcel of this strategy to incorporate Travellers into the working class is a range of obstacles placed in the way of the Traveller economy. Mobility is central to the viability of this economy, yet the state criminalises nomadism. The home space and the work space being one and the same is another feature, yet Travellers in the south are increasingly being obliged to sign agreements prohibiting them from collecting scrap if they wish to move onto a new site. The draft pitch licence agreement for Belfast sites states that:-

> "any scrap metal .. which the Licensee brings onto the site must be kept on the Licensee's vehicle and are in no circumstances to be removed from the vehicle while on site."

All this is institutional racism - racism that denies Travellers their right to practice their ethnicity and to have their identity recognised and resourced. Again in the words of Charles Husband:-

> "To link ethnicity with racism. The way I want to link it is through the idea of power .. the dominant ethnic group has all the institutions of the state in its control from the education system to the media to the legal system .. institutional racism is about power, it is about who has the right to give resources to who .. institutional racism happens when people go about their normal business without thinking what are the implications for other ethnic groups."(11)

This situation also captures the experience of other minority ethnic groups in Ireland. North and south these tend to be relatively small communities given the lack of any pull factors encouraging migrant labour to Ireland. As small communities they have difficulty in assembling the resources necessary to provide for any sort of cultural infrastructure. Little or no state support is available given the underlying project of assimilation - only we don't use that word anymore, we call it integration.

As with the Travellers, other ethnic minorities are faced with an education system that is strictly monocultural and that does not address the issue of racism. This latter point is important in that multi-cultural education has failed to address the power differential in the relationship between groups. Sometimes it has also failed to address cultural difference beyond the tangible and visible - the version entitled "saris, samoosas, and steel bands" - a version that was all too easily taken over by the new racism due to its limiting and incorrect definition of culture - a version that all too often involves the dominant group defining the culture of dominated groups.

There are other depressing parallels with the experience of the Travellers. The Chinese Welfare Association in Belfast reports "the refusal of one Housing Executive Officer to issue any more houses in her district to Chinese families". Equally the entrepreneurial efforts of the Chinese community face racist stereotyping in the restaurant business. This was captured in an unpleasant editorial in the September 1990 Catering and Licensing Review which stated:-

> "Yet the question must be asked, why do Chinese restaurants and carry-outs feature so often in food poisoning outbreaks? Outlets involved in food poisoning cases SEEM all too often to be Chinese, followed by Indian and other ethnic-type restaurants in this dubious league of poor food hygiene ACCORDING TO EXPERT OPINION."

According to expert opinion is the key to this piece. No statistics, no comparisons, just expert opinion. No analysis of media reporting - the media is a key institution for the transmission of racist stereotypes, again consciously or unconsciously. The above quote is as good an example as you could hope to find of this. The Vietnamese in the south seeking financial independence through mobile fast food outlets face similar harassment.

Employment is another arena that is a site for institutional racism. The labour force has been racialised and this process is used to determine who gets jobs and who gets promotion. In the south at present there are a number of black doctors who finished their training in Irish hospitals, who then married here and became Irish citizens only to find the Medical Council refused to recognize their qualifications. They are not allowed to take up the very same jobs they were doing prior to qualification.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to pose racism as a challenge to white people and settled people - both groups of which I am a member. White people and settled people benefit from a racist society - we are affirmed, we are resourced. As such we cannot be neutral - we can only be racist or anti-racist.

In taking up this challenge there are many pitfalls in addressing what is a complex and insidious form of oppression. Often the first instinct is to do something for the victim. This can often be paternalistic, a further expression of our power as white or settled people. Anti-racist strategy must focus on the white community and on the settled community. In starting from such a focus we must acknowledge the racist role played by white/settled society. We are the problem - we are the ones who have to change.

Another popular route for white/settled people is to respond to racism by seeking to learn about the minority group. We must know their culture so we can serve them better. I am not convinced of this, as more often than not we can end up taking over their culture and thus secure our power - a power we can then use to make racist institutions more acceptable rather than addressing the racist ethos, nature and structures of those institutions. We do need to learn to communicate across a cultural divide and to do so in a way that acknowledges racism and the potential for racism in that communication process. This though is a very different challenge.

If we are to address racism we must prioritize the institutional level. This can be easier said than done as it can be both daunting and personally threatening — because we cannot be about tilting at far away windmills we must start where we have some power — in our own institutions, in our own place of employment.

Finally it is worth highlighting that anti-racism is political. It demands that we go beyond cultural difference to examine economic and politically structured inequalities. It requires that we address the issue of power — how power is excercised and who excercises power. It ultimately involves us in a critique of the state. Therefore it demands that we are tactical so that we avoid marginalization, but also so that we avoid taking the easy way out and leaving it for another day.

References

(1) Committee of Inquiry on Racism and Xenophobia, Report of the Findings of the Enquiry, European Parliament, 1991.

(2) 'Race' in Britain, Continuity and Change, Hutchinson, C. Husband (Editor), quote from article by R. Miles.

(3) Report of the Commission on Itinerancy, Government Publications Sales Office, August 1963.

(4) Dublin County Council, Proposed Programme for the Accommodation of Travelling People, February 1991.

(5) Why Irish, Bord na Gaeilge, Tovey et al.

(6) As Quoted in "Nothing but the Same Old Story — The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism", written by Liz Curtis, Information on Ireland, 1984.

(7) Racism, 'Co-options' The Journal of the Comunity Workers Co-operative, December 1987.

(8) Setting the Context for Change, Anti-Racist Social Work Education, Central Council for the Education and Training in Social Work, 1991.

(9) The Travellers Health Status Study, Health Research Board, Barry, Herrity and Solan, 1987.

(10) Gypsies and Travellers, Dossiers for the Intercultural Training of Teachers, Council of Europe, Strasbourg 1987.

(11) Quoted from talk by Charles Husband to Seminar on "Ethnicity and Racism" organised by Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group.

Feminism and Ethnicity

by Anastasia Crickley

In my involvement with Traveller women over the past decade and in my work as an emigrant in Britain with other emigrant women from Ireland and elsewhere in the previous decade, the double burdens of gender and ethnic oppressions have been forcibly driven home to me.

Margaret Maughan writing for traveller women in 1989 says:

> *"Settled women look down on Traveller women and give out about them for the oppression that they suffer. But what a lot of settled women don't see is that Travelling and settled women are in the same boat when it comes to the way they are looked down on and treated in society by men."* (1)

The situation Margaret describes is complex, including external oppression and racism from the dominant group in the sedentary population, and both internal and external oppression from Traveller and settled men. Dealing with this intersection between gender and ethnic oppressions is also complex. As Beverly Bryan and her colleagues put it;

> *"We do have to deal with things like rape and domestic violence, and black men are as sexist as the next man… but if you are a black woman, you've got to begin with racism, it's not a choice, it's a necessity."* (2)

In the work of Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group we have found that the immediate reality of racism and discrimination for Traveller women — often perpetuated by 'other' settled women, — and for Travellers as a whole group, inevitably means that this external oppression takes priority.

In effect the pervasiveness of external oppressions make these the major priorities for all group members including Traveller women. It also becomes very difficult to prioritise the gender dimension of this oppression. For example, adequate and appropriate accommodation is required urgently by all Travellers but Traveller women, because of their homemaking roles, are most acutely affected by the lack of accommodation, sanitary and water

facilities. Equally I am conscious that many of the issues affecting working class and marginalised women, while they do have a gender dimension and one that needs to be addressed, are issues that affect the community as a whole, i.e. poverty, unemployment, inadequate social welfare provision and general class oppression.

Finally, Traveller women blamed, as Margaret Maughan puts it, for their own oppression, blamed in effect for being Travellers, feel constrained to defend somehow their right and the right of all Travellers to exist as Travellers. Again this leads to an ambivalent response to feminist issues. Lauretta Ngcobo, referring to Black women's relationship to feminism in Britain sums it up thus;

> *"Ours is an ambivalent position where we may be strongly critical of our men's assertive sexism… yet we are protective of them, not wanting them attacked… or even grouped with other men for their sexism."* (3)

This is a brief snapshot of a few of the issues one might face in attempting to deal with ethnic and gender oppressions. They are issues for all feminists, not just for women from subordinate ethnic groups and those directly involved with them, and they pose major challenges for feminist practice. For example a consciousness raising process with Traveller women could alienate them from their culture, be rejected as irrelevant and for settled women, or lead to a defence by the women of their men folk against settled people who are well known to be against all Travellers, men and women.

I will now look at some of the challenges these, and other associated concerns have posed for me as an aspiring feminist. In so doing I will examine ideas about feminism and about ethnicity, discuss my approach to the intersection between the two and raise some of the questions and contradictions posed in practice by them. I will also attempt to draw out some of the parallels for other issues. It is difficult if not impossible to examine this coming together of gender and ethnic issues without focusing on the class dimension. For just as women belong to different ethnic groups, some dominant, some subordinate, we also belong to different classes also dominant and subordinate. Some universally binding problems we may have, but our individual class and ethnic positions play a major role in our decisions about how to prioritise and work on these as the experiences already mentioned indicate. Many of our realities are not shared across class and ethnic boundaries.

In continuing to discuss these issues I will again draw on my involvement with Traveller women in the work of Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group (DTEDG) and the National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF). I do so acknowledging my position as a non-Traveller, with thanks to the many Traveller women who have helped shape my external understanding of their reality; and in the hope that together we can work towards their unfolding aspirations for change in appropriate and useful ways.

Feminism

Feminism I describe as theory and practice which acknowledges the oppression of women and seeks to transform this situation. Oppression means we are pressed down, not naturally but by other humans, i.e. men. From oppression a process of liberation is required. There are various ideas about this process, various strands of feminist theory — liberal, radical, socialist, black, spiritual — and various approaches to feminist practice which reflect similar divisions. Feminist theory and practice have not either, been free of ethnic and class bias. Agendas set around equality of access to education, training, jobs and pay are seen to have benefited mostly white, settled, middle class women. The poverty and marginalisation of working class women, though given verbal space have not achieved the same focus, or anything like the same results.

Women from subordinate ethnic groups found themselves rendered invisible initially within the Women's Movement and racism towards them continued in the struggle for universal liberation for the 'universal woman'. Patricia Collins in her book Black Feminist Thought (1990) states the position clearly;

> *"Theories advanced as being universally applicable to women as a group, on closer examination appear greatly limited by the white middle class origins of their proponents and … promote the notion of a generic woman who is white and middle class."* (4)

She might have added that such theories also promote notions of women as sedentary and Western in orientation. She does go on to give a long list of such theories, including the classical works of Nancy Chodrow and Carol Gilligan on mothering and the moral development of women respectively.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is often seen as something suffered by a minority group, a label to be avoided at all costs if one wants to achieve 'normal status' in society. However, membership of an ethnic group is arguably something which exists independently of individual will or choice, although identification with the group may be optional.

A young Irish woman in Britain may have nothing to do with the Irish community or Irish entertainment, yet her friends will label her as Irish and she may experience discrimination on that basis. In effect ethnicity may be understood as a cultural and social phenomenon, a way for people to organise social reality in terms of their cultural similarities and differences. The defining features of an ethnic group include a shared set of values, customs, traditions, language, religion and morality. Ethnic identity may be transmitted from one generation to the next, but ethnicity also changes and adapts in meaning over time, since it is produced by historically specific contexts. For example, as is very evident in the lack of assimilation to date of the 80s emigrants into the Irish American community, their perceptions of Irishness vary greatly from those of their predecessors.

Hilary Tovey and her colleagues in their study of Irish make the point that;

> "The construction of ethnicity is not just an identification of ourselves but our differentiation from others." (5)

Ethnicity is about cultures in contact, something we may only become aware of through contact with other groups, like the young women above. It could provide a basis on which to acknowledge and celebrate difference, thus enriching the society in which we live. Yet the wars of 1992, supposedly in the name of ethnicity, indicate another dimension. Power is the most fundamental basis of relations between ethnic groups. Hilary Tovey;

> "The illusion that the dominant powers have no underlying dominant ethnicity, that theirs is a 'universal' culture, is a carefully crafted and maintained illusion which is of great use politically and culturally." (6)

Dominant and Subordinate Ethnicity

The illusion that the dominant powers have no underlying dominant ethnicity is, for me, crucial to explore in any understanding of the intersection between ethnic and gender issues. This may be less obvious, though no less crucial, where the subordinate groups have the same colour skin as the dominant ones. Settled women see sedentarism as the norm. Settled feminists working for the liberation of Traveller women, may as indicated earlier, be unwittingly contributing to their cultural annihilation, through linking their gender oppression primarily to Traveller culture and the nomadic way of life. 'Proper', i.e. settled, accommodation may be seen as less drudgery and more say for Traveller women, and 'proper', i.e. settled, education as bringing progress for their daughters.

The reality that nomadism or the possibility of nomadism is central to Traveller women's cultural identity, even if they are perceived as having little say about when and where to move, is ignored. The reality that settled people's education largely omits Travellers from the curriculum and constitutes formation for a sedentary rather than a nomadic way of life is forgotten. The fact that the successful outcome of either process would be judged as Travellers becoming 'settled people' is not placed on the agenda. There are possible parallels in other areas too. What, one might ask, are the purposes and outcomes of women's projects in Third World Aid programmes? We might also examine in this light support for women's projects in the subordinate nationalist community of the north of Ireland. Modernisation, Westernisation and assimilation into the dominant culture may in all of these cases be masquerading as essential requirements in a liberation process.

On the other hand fear of interfering with the culture may lead to paralysis around naming, never mind addressing, gender oppression. Traveller women's programmes have been completed without any reference to sexism and gender oppression, or such subjects are skirted over without adequate discussion. A similar paralysis can affect relations between marginalised and middle class women. The dominant middle class ideology is supposedly addressed by giving unchallenged lip service to working class ideology, again ignoring its internal oppressions for fear of being accused of adding a further external one.

External Oppression

Addressing internal oppressions in the face of what may be experienced as all out class or cultural attack, is, as our work in DTEDG and with the NTWF indicate, extremely difficult. However, as I have already suggested regarding Travellers' accommodation, external oppressions have a gender dimension and they cannot be adequately addressed if that gender dimension is ignored. The feminisation of poverty and the way it differentially affects women and single parent families mostly headed by women has been well documented (e.g. in Mary Daly's book — Women and Poverty (1989). (7) What could be called the feminisation of racism means that Traveller women suffer more acutely oppressions experienced by the whole group. The appalling living conditions experienced by all Travellers mean that nearly all Traveller women suffer miscarriages, still births or lose small children — the perinatal mortality rate is nearly three times that of the settled population. In either case, in my experience, a clear analysis of the gender dimension of poverty or racism is required. Questions, such as why do women suffer this way, and how can we ensure that anti-poverty and anti-exclusion programmes do not further marginalise women (as indeed was the case with some early Third World aid programmes) need to be posed and responded to. In effect analysis and actions against poverty and racism need to specifically include women otherwise they do actually aid their oppression.

Internal Oppression

The reality of the gender dimension of external oppression for women from subordinate ethnic groups does not however remove internal gender oppression and the need to address it. Margaret Maughan and Beverly Bryan are clear that Traveller and Black men can be sexist too. In ethnic groups under attack from external dominant groups oppressive control of female sexuality may be seen as a way of maintaining group boundaries as well as providing males in the group, already themselves oppressed everywhere else, with ways of exercising some domination.

Heidi Hartmann, defining patriarchy, maintains that it involves a set of hierarchical social relations between men which allow for the control of women. (8) Even men at the bottom of the pile have direct control over some women, which, it could be argued helps keep the male hierarchy in place. Women in subordinate ethnic groups may be forbidden contact with (espe-

cially) men from other groups, or even outside their own direct families; have little or no choice with regard to marriage arrangements; and have all of their movements curtailed by a male-controlled hierarchy. Sexuality may be also defined in rigidly heterosexist terms leading one to assume for example that there are no Traveller lesbian/gay people whereas it may be the case that these have been forced to pretend not to exist even more than in the dominant sedentary group.

These and a host of other internal issues cannot await the nirvana of group liberation to be focused on. Firstly they oppress and objectify women. Women from different cultures and different classes may prioritise the gender oppressions that they need liberation from differently. In particular white, settled middle class women being relatively free of external class and racist oppressions can more readily focus on issues of individual choice, freedom and sexuality. However all women know the experience of internal gender oppressions. Women from subordinate ethnic groups, like Travellers, need support to name the oppressions they know, and define their own priorities and own strategies around addressing them.

Secondly gender oppressions are destructive of women, limiting their potential and casting them in roles as each others keepers' — it is frequently the older women in subordinate ethnic groups who enforce group rules regarding the control of female sexuality, thus finding their own power and making the process of liberation more difficult. Thirdly a 'process of liberation' which allows for the continuation of women's oppression is impossible, in my view, to define as fully liberating. It is also argued that the sexual control of women among oppressed groups acts as a serious barrier to collective organisation for liberation — in the Traveller community important and powerful women leaders like Nan Joyce have emerged, but there are doubtless many more, still confined to the domestic sphere, whose contributions could be crucial.

Conclusion

In conclusion I return to the description of feminism as theory and practice to address the oppression of women, who in everyday life belong to dominant and subordinate classes, dominant and subordinate ethnic groups, and dominant and subordinate sectors within these groups. The oppression of subordinate ethnic groups, the gendered nature of this oppression, and the oppression of women within these groups, means that a simple universal

grouping of women cannot achieve women's liberation. The nature and complexity of the power relations between dominant and subordinate groups ensures this so that, as I have argued, settled women's liberation does not automatically mean liberation for Traveller women.

Feminists working across cultures and classes need to acknowledge and take on board strategies and priorities which vary from their own. In effect I am saying that only feminism which is explicitly anti-racist (and anti-class oppression) in its theory and in its practice can really attempt to address the oppression of all women. Action on women's issues which is not explicitly anti-racist and anti-class oppression cannot therefore be described as feminist if feminism is about the liberation of all women. This poses a major challenge to all aspiring feminists (including myself) and one which needs much more analysis, resourcing and action.

References

(1) Maughan, Margaret; Co-options, Journal of the Community Workers Co-operative, May 1989.

(2) Bryan, Beverly, Dadzie Stella & Scafe Suzanne; The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives — Britain, Virago, London, 1985.

(3) Ngcobo, Lauretta (ed); Let it be Told: Essays by Black Women — Britain, Virago, London, 1988.

(4) Collins, Patricia; Black Feminist Thought, Routledge, London, 1990.

(5) Tovey, Hilary, et al; Why Irish: Language & Identity — Ireland Today, Bord na Gaeilge, Dublin, 1989.

(6) ibid Tovey, Hilary et al.

(7) Daly, Mary; Women & Poverty, Attic Press, Dublin 1989.

(8) Hartmann, Heidi in Sargent, Lydia (ed); The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism & Feminism, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Irish Travellers:
New Analysis and New Initiatives

The Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group is a mixed group of Travellers and settled people that has been working with the Traveller community since 1985. The DTEDG is part of the E.C. 'Poverty 3' programme. As such the DTEDG has been involved in a range of transnational activities.

Within these activities the DTEDG has presented a number of papers at various conferences. This book brings together a collection of these with a view to ensuring their broad dissemination and as a contribution to addressing the lack of printed material that exists to resource Travellers, and those working with them, in seeking to assert the rights of their community.

The papers provide analyses of ethnicity and racism that set out the relevance of these to the Traveller community. They provide a framework which sets out and evaluates the range of responses to the situation of the Travellers. A particular focus is given to the community work approach pursued by the DTEDG. The Traveller economy, the education of Travellers, and the experience of Traveller women are also examined in separate papers.