Homelessness in Dublin: An Irish Urban Disorder

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By Kevin C. Kearns*

ABSTRACT. Urban *homelessness* in *Dublin* has emerged as one of Ireland's most serious *socioeconomic problems.* Etiological explanations for the estimated 1,200 homeless individuals in the capital range from personal problems to the *structure* of Irish *society.* Empirical examination reveals that many Irish are drawn into the homeless network through personal crises such as poor *health, alcoholism, economic deprivation,* and *psychiatric disturbances.* However, it is the inequitable *social, economic, political,* and *legislative system* which ordinarily entraps them in this deprived state. Thus, the causes of Irish home-lessness are fundamentally structural. The Irish Government has no policy or program for assisting the urban homeless. Consequently, they have become wards of charitable agencies ill-equipped to care properly for them. Reform legislation seems to be needed. But public apathy and prejudice suggests that it will not be enacted soon.

I

An 'Underground' Society

THE PROBLEM OF HOMELESSNESS in Irish society is not one of which the Irish people, or at least their leaders, are unaware. Brendan Ryan, speaking at a national conference in the Irish Republic, stated flatly:

[There exists in Irish society] a fundamental, structural inequality which produces home-lessness, poverty, and injustice. . . . people are not equal, people are unequal.[1]

Homelessness is a socioeconomic malady endemic to most large urban centers throughout the world. It has been called the "greatest scourge of our age."[2] Nearly every city has its 'skid row,' its abandoned tenements and commercial buildings in which outcasts huddle, or, chiefly in Latin America and Asia, its shanty town.

For most nations it is a sensitive problem because of high visibility—the homeless obtrude boldly upon the urban scene in blatant public view. They stand indiscreetly as accusing symbols of the host society's abject failure to

provide for a deprived segment of the population. In this respect, homelessness is a harsh indictment of citizenry, government, and the "system" itself.

Homelessness may be defined in a variety of ways.[3] Bahr and Caplow regard it as

> a condition of detachment from society characterized by the absence or attenuation of the affiliative bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structures.[4]

Homelessness is a distinguishing characteristic of absolute deprivation, setting it off from the relative deprivation of the low income, bare subsistence family. To sociologists, the homeless are the "disenfranchised," "disaffiliated," "forgotten men" of the urban jungle. They carry myriad labels—hobos, tramps, vagrants, beggars, skid-rowers, and down-and-outs. In Dublin, where homelessness has become one of the "greatest social problems facing Ireland today" they are known as "dossers" and may be simply described as:[5]

> Those men and women who have nowhere to live, no place of their own, who sleep in hostels, night shelters, in telephone kiosks, in abandoned cars and in the open air . . . lacking an address, they lack a sense of identity . . . they are impoverished financially and emotionally.[6]

There are now an estimated 1,200 homeless persons in the capital city and homelessness has become a highly distinguishable feature of Dublin's urban ecology. The homeless habitat covers a three-quarters of a square mile district of the decrepit inner-city around the Guinness Brewery, Power's Distillery, and Collin's Barracks. The homeless especially congregate along Benburb Street, Sarsfield Quay, Bridge Street, and assorted other quays and arterial streets near the Liffey River. Homelessness has emerged as a particularly vexing social issue because it inherently contradicts the long tradition of the Irish "taking care of their own" during times of hardship.

Because urban homelessness is essentially an alien phenomenon to the Irish, it is largely ignored and neglected by authorities. Yet, the homeless are increasingly conspicuous by virtue of their mounting numbers, impoverishment, transiency, and anti-social practices of begging, drunkenness, and "sleeping rough" in public places. From Dubliners, they invite a curious mixture of apathy, sympathy, rejection, repulsion, and fascination. To the Irish Government, they are an embarrassing blight on the Dublin cityscape because they constitute one of the "most obvious examples of the existence of poverty and destitution in Irish society."[7]

Despite their heightened visibility, the homeless have "merited little attention or research."[8] The only documentation consists of superficial newspaper articles, descriptive and fragmentary reports compiled by social service agencies, and a few generalized accounts of Irish homelessness written by professionals.

Therefore, little is known about how this Irish "underground society" functions and survives in the urban morass.[9] The purpose of this article, based on field research, is to examine homelessness in Dublin in terms of the following aspects: etiological explanations, social-structural factors, demographic composition, shelterization process, and prejudicial impediments to integration and reform. Examination of these factors reveals a causal relationship between the inequitable functioning of the Irish social, economic, and political system and the existence of homelessness in Dublin.

II

Etiology of Irish Homelessness

VAGRANCY HAS LONG been a part of Europe's turbulent history. Prior to the Protestant Reformation, European countries abounded with wanderers and vagrants of all sorts. They subsisted largely on the kindness and alms of the people. But when Protestantism adopted the Pauline Doctrine of "He who will not work shall not eat," downtrodden itinerants were treated with far less sympathy and compassion; they were commonly viewed as responsible for their own misfortune.

Homelessness has "always been a feature of Irish society."[10] Ireland's long history of repression, poverty, famine, evictions, economic deprivation, and political strife naturally gave rise to widespread vagrancy and mendicancy. However, because of their repressed colonial status and general refusal to embrace the tenets of Protestantism, the Irish exhibited a generally more accepting attitude toward the poor, deviant, and wayward.[11] In Medieval Ireland even the lepers and insane were cared for with kindness within their own communities, rather than being treated as outcasts. The Irish have traditionally assisted the gypsies and other vagrant types. It was typical for the Irish peasantry, though poor themselves, to provide "people of the road" with temporary shelter and a bit of food. This tradition of accepting and helping wanderers is still remembered in rural areas today—though it is seldom practiced.[12] Over the past several decades this system of rural support has gradually eroded and the country's dispossessed have migrated toward cities where voluntary charitable organizations have replaced individual hospitality.

The etiology of homelessness in present-day Dublin is complex. Causative factors range from the "structure of society to the individual personality."[13] Though each homeless individual has his own personal experience of deprivation and disaffiliation, several salient problems are commonly shared: unstable childhood, limited education, family stress, marital strife, health or psychological

disorders, lack of occupational skill, and prolonged unemployment. The process of homelessness normally involves "push-pull" forces in which an individual is gradually rejected by, or withdraws from, normative society and is attracted to the homeless milieu. This process of disaffiliation, estrangement, and alienation is consistent with Merton's anomie theory in which an individual reacts and adjusts to the disjuncture between socially prescribed goals and expectations and the available means of actually achieving them. Most of Dublin's homeless, suffering from some combination of the above-cited problems, are unable to cope with stress and fulfill expectations; thus, they become rejects or retreatists, losing family and social bonds and seeking haven in a marginal, but tolerant, community within the inner-city.

In Ireland, personal problems incontestably lead many people into a life of homelessness. Indeed, the majority of Irish homeless start from a basis of early socioeconomic deprivation and "tumble farther down the social ladder" as they grow older.[14] Owing to family breakdown or personal disorders, many have lived much of their early life in reformatories or institutions. Therefore, they began their "retreat" in childhood and were often social isolates long before they became adult homeless.

Acute alcoholism and psychological illness are especially prevalent causes of Irish homeless. It is estimated that one quarter of Dublin's homeless suffer serious alcoholism which contributed to marital dissolution, social rejection, loss of employment, and diminished self-image.[15] Psychologically disturbed individuals are increasingly falling into the ranks of the urban homeless. This may be attributed in significant part to the *Report of the Commission of Enquiry on Mental Illness* (1966) which placed great emphasis on community care. It advocated extensive out-patient treatment based on visitations to clinics and community psychiatric nursing care. However, such clinics and psychiatric services are woefully lacking in Ireland. In the absence of sufficient out-patient care, the psychologically needy are casually discharged from hospitals and, in effect, "dumped" into the growing homeless pool; they are inevitably drawn into the urban hostel network. A smaller, yet significant, number of homeless are ex-prisoners who also are unable to adjust to normal society and seek refuge in the Dublin homeless habitat.

The homeless population is comprised of an increasing number of "barred men," those who have been expelled by their families for some type of disruptive or deviant behavior (usually drinking, drug use, or violence). This is a reflection of a notable change in Irish society over the past few decades. Simply put, wives and children are less inclined than in past times to benignly endure abuses in the home which inflict shame or suffering on others. Today there is

a greater willingness either to have the husband committed for care, or expelled from the home. Furthermore, there is in modern Irish society generally a breakdown of the traditional patterns of family and community care which provided support and tolerance for individuals in times of stress. This has been exacerbated by the trend toward dispersal of the extended family. Not long ago, many Irish homes were occupied by three generational groups. Today it is common for children, parents, and grandparents to be separated, often by considerable distance, in different housing estates. This has weakened traditionally strong family bonds and often led to elderly relatives being left alone, isolated, and neglected.

Economic marginality ultimately plunges many individuals into homelessness in Dublin. Unskilled status, loss of job, and prolonged unemployment create a fragile dependence on the "dole." This welfare assistance may be barely sufficient for survival for a man with home and family support. But for a homeless individual, this minimal income is increasingly insufficient to cover the costs of housing, food, clothing, and other needs. There is usually little choice but to seek shelter in a hostel. Ordinarily, it is the *cumulative effect* of personal, health, and financial problems which propels an individual into the downward spiral toward homeless status. But, in many respects, it is social-structural failure in Irish society which entraps him in this deprived state.

III

Social-Structural Factors

HOMELESSNESS IN DUBLIN far transcends simple personal problems—its roots "lie within the economic and social structure" of contemporary Irish society.[16] Perhaps most evident, and fundamental, is the Irish Government's "conspicuous lack of support" for the homeless population.[17] In essence, the government rationalizes that to assist the urban homeless would be to tacitly legalize and encourage vagrancy. Such facile, myopic reasoning suggests a complete lack of understanding of the phenomenon of urban homelessness. As a consequence, the prevailing Irish legal system is intended to penalize the homeless for their status, thus ostensibly serving as a deterrent, rather than to assist them as a remedy. This is clearly reflected in the archaic laws relating to vagrancy, begging, and 'sleeping rough'; all are still covered by antiquated social codes not applicable to modern society.

The Vagrancy Act of 1824, Breach of Peace Act of 1824, and Nuisances in Public Thoroughfares Act of 1851 still govern most of the conduct of the homeless. Owing to the preservation of such outmoded laws, homeless persons are

routinely hauled into Irish courts. Rarely are they legally represented and seldom does anyone provide a character reference or evidence on their behalf. Practically all such cases are dealt with summarily in the lower courts where even the judges often exhibit prejudice against them.[18] Under such circumstances, the homeless are commonly too intimidated to contest their innocence or demand their rights. Consequently, Drury affirms that, though they are Irish citizens in theory, in reality they have "virtually no rights under the Irish law."[19] When the homeless are fined for their "anti-social" acts the amount imposed (though reasonable by middle-class standards) is normally beyond their financial resources; thus they may be committed to prison. Indeed, a person simply found without visible support, or who has been sleeping rough in the city, can be directly sentenced to six months imprisonment.

Overt discrimination against the homeless is also manifest in governmental housing policies and procedures. Traditionally, Ireland's County Homes, run by the Regional Health Boards throughout the country, provided for the basic needs of the vagrant and homeless. Their casual wards offered food and shelter within the context of human dignity. It was always regarded as a respectable means of caring for the poor. However, during the 1970s and 1980s there has occurred a widespread and arbitrary closure of many of these facilities. This action has been taken to save State funds, but with no formal policy declaration or investigation of the hardships it imposes on the country's homeless. The closure of these homes has triggered an urbanward drift of the homeless toward Dublin which serves as a magnet with its hostels and related support system.

Once in Dublin, the homeless have little chance of securing private accommodation because of their economic marginality and the government's discriminatory housing policy. Since the early sixties inner-Dublin has experienced massive upheaval as the result of modernization and urban redevelopment. A frenzied city center-to-suburban exodus has resulted in a dramatic decline in housing accommodations in the heart of Dublin. Government policy has been to forcibly transplant lower-income groups from the urban core to sterile State housing developments in the suburbs; their old inner-city neighborhoods are then either demolished or left to decay. As a result, there is a great scarcity of low-income housing left in the city. But even when private flats are available, they are seldom affordable to single homeless men on welfare incomes.

Ireland's government housing system ignores the needs of the single urban homeless. Housing authorities employ a rigid "points" system in which families and married couples are accorded priority. Single homeless individuals are excluded from eligibility. Deprived of acquiring housing through normal channels, they sometimes, in desperation, turn to authorities for some type of short-

term shelter. But due to the "appalling confusion" which exists between the Government Housing Authorities and the Health Boards (the two principal agencies responsible for meeting basic human needs), the homeless are routinely shunted between the two, receiving decent treatment from neither.[20] In the absence of a definitive government policy covering homelessness, each agency claims that responsibility for this forgotten segment of society falls within the jurisdiction of the other. Health Boards sometimes even neglect the health needs of the homeless, claiming that their poor physical condition stems from their homeless status; therefore, they may be shifted back to housing authorities who inform them that they do not meet eligibility standards. Disqualified from receiving government housing, the homeless have no recourse but to seek hostel shelters.

The homeless are victimized not only by the legislative system and housing policies but also by prevailing societal and governmental attitudes toward their plight. Beginning in the early 1960s, Ireland's government embarked upon a bold economic scheme to revitalize the national economy. This meant focusing national attention on the major issues of thwarting emigration, attracting foreign investment, promoting regional growth, and modernizing cities. Lesser social-economic problems came to be viewed as merely "marginal issues"—often completely ignored. Economic development over the past twenty years has markedly elevated the living standards of most Irish but in the process it has created a greater class division between the well-to-do and the poor. As Irish society has become progressively more affluent, the marginal groups have become more isolated and alienated in society. There has, in fact, developed a tendency to accept strong right wing views regarding social issues in which the poor and deprived are often seen as being largely responsible for their own misery and deprivation. Irish newspapers, which exert a potent influence on the thinking of the well-read Irish citizenry, collectively show a greater tendency than those in other European Economic Community (E.E.C.) countries to blame the poor for their own misfortune.[21]

Because of widespread public apathy toward the problem of homelessness, there is little effort among politicians to champion reforms directed at assisting these underprivileged citizens. In fact, there is an "enormous temptation of politicians to temporize, to pretend the problem doesn't really exist."[22] The Government essentially operates on the premise that its minimal welfare assistance program is sufficient to meet the basic needs of the country's poor—despite irrefutable evidence to the contrary in the midst of the capital. There has been no governmental attempt to investigate the special social, economic, health, or psychiatric needs of the homeless population. It remains accepted

that solutions to social problems in the country lie with the provision of cen-
tralized, strictly controlled general services. Any suggestions of structural cause
for poverty, or structural reform as a solution, are commonly "rejected as the
alien expressions of a dangerous philosophy."[23] Crisply put, the Irish Govern-
ment is not amenable to "change or advice on the development of equitable
social policy."[24] Instead, the standard approach to dealing with most problems
of poverty and deprivation is to treat the symptoms and temporarily defuse the
situation rather than endeavoring to diagnose and deal with the underlying
problems. But in the case of the urban homeless, who are essentially passive
and powerless, the Government fails to make even token gestures toward remedy.
As a consequence, the homeless of Dublin remain the country's most disen-
franchised social group.

It is also important to note that the particular causes which lead a person
into homelessness are not necessarily the ones which keep him imprisoned
there. The life of homelessness leads to physical and mental deterioration
which prevent a person, if deprived of assistance, from regaining stability and
status. Once an individual becomes dependent on the homeless network, he
finds himself in an environment which is counter-productive. He is not likely
to extricate himself from this condition without external support. It is precisely
for this reason that the present social-structural system in Ireland militates
against treatment and solution of urban homelessness.

IV

The Inner-urban Milieu as a Homeless Refuge

THE PROCESS OF BECOMING HOMELESS involves not only a social shift but also a
spatial displacement. An individual is expelled or withdraws from an unac-
ceptable or intolerable setting (home, hospital, or institution) and retreats to
a locale of acceptance and survivability. In Western society, most homeless
find refuge in the bowels of large cities. This urban homeless habitat is commonly
known as "skid row." It is ordinarily an easily definable territorial enclave where
the homeless gather and reside. Over time, skid row districts evolve into distinct
ecological areas within the larger urban system. However, as Wallace documents,
skid row is not merely a geographic entity but a "way of life" in which most
normal modes of social behavior are suspended or ignored.[25] For this reason,
its residents are perceived as a deviant community.

Dublin's homeless habitat does not conform to the North American skid row
prototype. Instead of a concentrated core or urban strip, it assumes the form
of a dispersed network. This Liffey Riverfront section of the city, characterized

by physical dilapidation, economic stagnation, and social stress, has become a catchment cell for the dispossessed. It has been described as a "no-man's land" and "twilight zone." Most Dubliners regard it as an abyss but the homeless have found it to be a sanctuary. This repository for social marginals and rejects offers hostel shelter, cheap restuarants, social service centers, and accessible pubs; equally important, it provides anonymity, acceptance, and the absence of social expectations and pressures. Thus, for the homeless it has evolved as a physical haven and psychic asylum.

Dublin's homeless refuge offers virtually no opportunity for personal economic independence. Thirty years ago there was great demand in the central city for unskilled and semi-skilled labor. Jobs were readily available at the huge Guinness Brewery, the docks, and at factories and markets. However, mechanization, containerization, and unionization have greatly reduced the availability of such employment. There has also been a steady shift of business and industry from the inner-city to the suburbs. The government has devised no scheme to halt this urban degenerative trend. As a consequence, employment opportunities in central Dublin are scarce. The homeless must compete with others for the few menial jobs which remain and they are at a great disadvantage because of their limited education, unskilled status, lack of permanent address, absence of references, and often poor health. Therefore, they are urban dwellers but do not, for the most part, participate in the urban economic system.

Though most Dubliners assiduously eschew the homeless domain, it is well etched in their mind. This is largely the result of strong journalistic labeling. Newspaper articles commonly refer to the area as "slumland," "dosserland," and "vagrant town." This both creates and reinforces in the public psyche the notion of a separate, and *unequal,* urban district occupied by, even *reserved* for, a special segment of the population. There is irrefutable evidence of such territorial segregation and the consequent creation of a homeless "reserve." For example, the police attempt to control and restrict the homeless within specific areal confines. In most sections of the city socially deviant behavior (such as alcoholic consumption and inebriation, abusive acts and language, and sleeping rough in public places) is strictly prohibited. Enforcement is especially rigid in high-density tourist zones. Conversely, in "dosserland" such behavior is routinely ignored or overtly condoned. Hence, there seems to be a certain restricted urban space allocated specifically for the poor and deprived— informally designated sectors of "respectability" and "non-respectability" apparently recognized by both citizens and authorities. Indeed, some Irish police commonly reprimand homeless individuals for peregrinations beyond "their area" in violation of unwritten, but clearly recognized, Dublin "apartheid" lines.

V

Sheltering of the Dispossessed

THE GOVERNMENT'S BASIC ROLE of non-involvement in housing the nation's dis-
possessed has meant that they have, by necessity, become the wards of voluntary,
charitable organizations. As the homeless population has expanded, there has
developed in inner-Dublin a "hostel network" to shelter them. This network
consists of nine principal hostels with a capacity for accommodating about
1,200 persons. Of the nine, eight are run by voluntary groups and the other is
managed by the Dublin Corporation with some State funding. Dublin's hostels
offer a last refuge. These "doss houses" (as they are most commonly known)
are anachronisms—"relics that bear witness to an age of cold charity."[26] Most
buildings are at least 100 years old and in terms of physical condition range
from primitive to appalling; there is little privacy or personal attention. The
hostels are managed by kind, but often inexperienced, volunteers and are typ-
ically understaffed, under-financed, and poorly equipped. Owing to severe per-
sonnel and financial constraints, they are concerned largely with containment
rather than rehabilitation. Within this context, they really function more as
human warehouses than treatment centers. At best, they provide a bed and
modest meals, though two do have the services of a visiting doctor and nurse.

Hostels differ more in policy and philosophy than in services rendered. Some
are far more restrictive and selective than others. A few charge as little as five
cents per night (a token fee intended to instill a sense of pride and dignity in
paying one's own way) while others have rates of nearly twenty dollar per
week. All require residents to depart the premise each morning after breakfast
and not return until a specified evening hour. Some men have resided in the
same hostel for nearly twenty years, yet they are still required to "book in"
each evening. The majority of hostels reserve the right to refuse or reject
occupants for reasons of drinking, drug use, violence, or other anti-social habits.
Conversely, one hostel has an "open door" policy, admitting anyone off the
street. This liberal policy has been condemned by critics as merely "putting a
roof over skid row."[27] Hostels also exhibit variant philosophical ideals. A few
make no pretense at trying to reform, convert, or otherwise "save" their oc-
cupants. But the hostels run by the Legion of Mary and the Society of St. Vincent
dePaul are committed to serving the spiritual as well as physical needs of their
residents. Hence, the homeless are liable to encounter everything from "naive
idealism to spiritual patronization to true care."[28]

Apart from the hostel population, there exists in the city a fringe homeless
group. These individuals, who eschew any sort of institutional shelter, are

referred to by social workers as "outmen." For the most part, they are men who suffer from chronic alcoholism or psychiatric disorders and simply reject society. They sleep rough in the city's parks, alleyways, doorways, or abandoned cars. They are extremely reclusive, living an hermitic existence. They are normally regarded by social service agencies as beyond salvation and are left to cope on their own beyond the margins of society.

<div align="center">VI</div>

Demographic Profile

As a socially disenfranchised group residing in a sequestered, disreputable urban environment, the homeless of Dublin justifiably constitute what Leahy and Magee regard as a distinct "homeless persons culture."[29] They manage to function well beyond the normal, approved conventions of Irish society—devoid of family, job, status, and respectability. Yet, there is scant demographic information about this subcultural group. There has been no systematic, comprehensive survey of the population. Some statistical data have been compiled by the various social service agencies serving the homeless. Though this documentation is fragmentary, it does provide a useful general demographic profile.

Though Dublin's homeless population is estimated at 1,200, there is no reliable system for precise quantification because there is a constant inflow-outflow of homeless persons in the city. The number at any given time depends on such factors as seasonality, economic conditions, and hostel availability. It has also been found that there is a migration of individuals from one homeless population center to another, both within and beyond Dublin. Therefore, there exists a floating population comprised of individuals who freely enter and depart the homeless circuit for varying periods.

The homeless do not constitute a homogeneous group, but they do tend to share certain salient problems and characteristics. There is a certain egalitarian character about the collective homeless population because in Irish society the downward social spiral of homelessness is essentially classless in the sense that professionals, tradesmen, and laborers all become equal in their deprived status. Most are completely disaffiliated from family and friends and suffer emotional and psychological disorders; all have some difficulty in coping with the daily demands of life. The majority have been institutionalized in one form or another. Approximately one-quarter are alcoholics and about a third are diagnosed as schizophrenic.[30] The ratio of men to women is about four to one and nearly 40 percent are over 50 years of age.[31] Almost all are now single, though many were at one time married. Health problems are widespread. The

most common ailments, often caused by or aggravated by vagrancy and home-lessness, are respiratory diseases, gastro-intestinal sicknesses, nutritional de-ficiencies, and skin problems.[32]

The homeless exhibit considerable mobility. This is really a type of "forced" mobility since they are discharged daily from their hostels and must fend for themselves until evening. Most faithfully follow a set drifting pattern revolving around visitations to food and tea centers (run by religious and charitable groups), clothing banks, health boards, and counseling offices. Some prefer to beg or drink the hours away. Mobility is strongly determined by weather and seasonality. During warm months the homeless seek out park benches, laneways, or pedestrian thoroughfares for ambling or congregating. During inclement periods they enter churches or nestle in doorways for shelter.

Despite the limited opportunities, a number of homeless regularly search for some type of casual or temporary employment both to supplement their meager welfare income and to bolster deflated pride. The few jobs they manage to find are ordinarily those rejected by others. Most commonly these include work as night watchmen, parking lot attendants, menial cleaning chores in clinics and hospitals, or holding up advertising boards along sidewalks for shops and restaurants. Some persons are reduced to serving as guinea pigs at drug testing centers for a few pounds reward. Around Christmas time some receive "conscience money" from relatives who seldom, if ever, visit the hostel.[33]

Three particularly distinguishing characteristics of the Dublin homeless are their loneliness, hopelessness, and powerlessness. Despite the shared communal setting in hostels they seldom develop meaningful social relationships. Apart from sharing meals and television viewing, most remain largely isolated. Oc-casionally, they may group in small numbers for conversation or visitation to a local pub, but even these relationships tend to be superficial and ephemeral. Because homeless men have so little contact with women they often cling to female social workers, nurses, and nuns as surrogate mother and sister figures. Over time, homelessness tends to breed hopelessness. Many become increas-ingly passive and docile; they eventually have "no fight left in them."[34] Some actually become apathetic to self-preservation.

The homeless are incontestably the most powerless group in Irish society. They possess no material or financial resources, command no public respect, have little public or government support or representation, and suffer from a near total lack of self confidence and esteem. Collectively, they are an inarticulate, vulnerable group—pawns of a discriminatory socioeconomic system and wards of well-meaning but ill-equipped charitable agencies. As Stewart bluntly asserts:

> The homeless may theoretically have rights as Irish citizens, but, realistically, without money behind them, without the backing of what is called "respectability," they will be abused by the State, they will be abused by the Gardai (police), and they will be abused by the courts.[35]

Therefore, in many respects, the homeless are bound together most meaningfully by their collective, deprived, disenfranchised status.

<div align="center">VII</div>

Prejudicial Impediments to Integration and Reform

MacGriel contends that "social prejudice is probably the most serious cause of social deprivation" in the country today.[36] He has authoritatively documented that in Irish society public attitudes toward the disadvantaged play a significant role in their treatment, rehabilitation, or neglect.[37] Government authorities and politicians are extremely sensitive to the negative expressions of the Irish citizenry toward deprived groups. Crisply stated, Irish officials seldom "go against the tide of prejudice" for fear of inviting unpopularity.[38]

This prevailing "high level of social prejudice" in contemporary Irish society is directed most conspicuously toward the country's two major pariah groups— the Traveling People (also known as the Itinerants, Tinkers, or Gypsies) and the urban homeless of Dublin.[39] The latter group is especially stigmatized and stereotyped as "social lepers" and the "dregs of society." They are strongly associated with drinking, begging, deviancy, and violation of social norms, thereby representing the very "antithesis of the values" of Irish society.[40] As O'Brien explains:

> The homeless are seen as being dirty, unkempt, and ragged. They are worthless, lazy, unemployable individuals who refuse to work if they are given the opportunity; they are incurable, hopeless drug addicts, drunks, alcoholics, and winos. They are seen as being criminal and deviant.[41]

In truth, most Irish have very little reliable information about this sequestered, outcast group. Public perceptions are generally based on cursory visual street contact and superficial, often distorted, newspaper articles. It has, in fact, been alleged that Irish society, in general, "does not want to know about them" in any serious, responsible manner.[42] Prejudice thrives amid such a closed mentality. Because the Irish are such avid readers, newspapers have played a particularly prominent role in the formation of public attitudes toward minority groups. As previously noted, Irish newspapers have a natural inclination to blame the domestic poor for their own plight. An examination of newspaper articles relating to the homeless reveals that Irish journalists commonly treat them as malingerers. Articles are frequently based on superficial research, unsubstantiated allegations, and tenuous conclusions. Too often, the homeless issue is couched in a biased, simplistic context which serves to create in the mind of readers a "them and us" division.[43] The facile use of value-laden and highly emotive language is particularly destructive to the cause of objectivity. So, too, is the popular use of sensational, shock-value type photographs usually portraying a homeless

figure in a drunken stupor obstructing the flow of pedestrian traffic along an otherwise "respectable" urban streetscape. As Ryan affirms, these journalistic tactics not only create biased, pejorative images of the homeless but they tend also to "reflect popular prejudice, popular views."[44] Hence, there has developed a reinforcing type of prejudicial imagery of the homeless.

Overt public prejudice against the homeless is manifested in many spheres of Irish life. On the streets they are regularly met with opprobrium and hostility. In shops they may be rejected or banished. They are routinely treated with scorn and disapproval in clinics, hospitals, and courts. In Irish courts, ostensibly the bastion of social justice, it is often simply presumed that the homeless "have no feelings" and they are dealt with as merely a "public nuisance."[45] But discrimination is most blatant in the area of housing. Dublin's Simon Community has made several attempts to integrate homeless persons back into normalized residential life through a "halfway house" scheme. Houses for this assimilative purpose were acquired in several Dublin suburbs. But such attempts have been met with vigorous social, political, legal, and even physical opposition by local residents. In some cases this has taken the form of peaceful demonstrations and street protests. In other instances it has provoked "passionate and violent" reaction as local vigilante groups were formed to physically repel or expel the intruders.[46] Local residents opposed integration on the grounds that the newcomers would introduce into their communities drinking, violence, and generally deviant behavior which would have an adverse impact on the host community and would ultimately lead to declining property values. The defensive argument posited by social workers, that no such problems were likely to occur since the homeless persons involved in the experiments were carefully selected and highly responsible, was rejected outright. During these episodes newspapers sometimes fanned the fires of fear and prejudice; one newspaper referred to a halfway house in bold print as a "House of Horrors."[47] It is important to note that citizen opposition, whether peaceful or violent, was not a matter of individual, isolated acts of prejudice, but a concerted, collective group action.

During these abortive housing efforts, local authorities, clergy, and politicians were conspicuous for their benign indifference or overt opposition to the plan.[48] They clearly were not inclined to invite criticism or electoral unpopularity by countering public sentiment. This experience manifestly supports MacGriel's finding that authorities are strongly influenced by prevailing public prejudice. For precisely this reason, the persistence of prejudicial attitudes toward the homeless in Dublin constitutes an imposing, and enduring, barrier to social, economic, and legislative reform.

VIII

Prospects for Reform

Justice (in Irish society) does not happen . . . it has to be willed and worked for and built into legislation.[49]

DESPITE DRAMATICALLY MOUNTING VISIBILITY, homelessness in Dublin remains an essentially untreated malady. There is still no government policy or program for formally recognizing and remedying urban homelessness. This suggests that meaningful reforms will occur only when there develops a "political will to promote and implement them and a general public will to support them financially."[50] There is finally some encouraging evidence of such incipient concern for the homeless population. A number of voluntary agencies presently serving the needs of the homeless, convinced that the "failure to deal with structural problems" remains at the roots of homelessness, are jointly formulating a Homeless Persons Act.[51] They have gained the support of an Irish legislator who is dedicated to championing the rights of deprived minorities in Ireland though it is not politically fashionable to do so. Upon draft completion, he will formally submit this document as a major Bill before the Irish Senate. In essence, the Homeless Persons Act calls for drastically revising archaic laws relating to poverty and vagrancy, legally defining homelessness, constitutionally establishing a "charter of rights" for homeless persons, and resolving the confusion of responsibilities between Housing Authorities and Health Boards. Such legislative reform would define and guarantee equal rights for the homeless. Presentation of this Bill before the Senate promises to generate a healthy dialogue on this long-ignored social issue. Through a more fair, balanced system of media coverage there might occur some positive change in public attitudes.

Concurrent with legislative reform should be a major revision of the discriminatory government housing policy which disqualifies urban single homeless from all rights to State housing facilities. Proponents of the Homeless Persons Act contend that the Government must "on behalf of Irish society . . . undertake to provide suitable homes for the homeless."[52] To accomplish this, it has been proposed that one per cent of Dublin's Housing Authority funds be used specifically for the provision of low-income flats and small group houses for single homeless individuals. It is recognized that, owing to problems of poor health, advanced age, and personal problems, a proportion of the homeless could not be integrated successfully back into normal, independent social life and would have to remain in some type of supervised hostel system. Such shelters could be managed by government agencies or private, volunteer organizations with some State financial assistance.

In light of these nascent efforts to finally address the problem of homelessness through fundamental structural changes, there is reason to hope that some social, economic, and legislative reforms might be forthcoming. However, support for, and passage of, the Homeless Persons Act remains uncertain at this time because, as Cluskey rightfully concludes, in Irish society "bringing about worthwhile change can be a long and frustrating process."[53] At least the process seems to have begun.

Notes

1. Brendan Ryan, "The Political Challenge", *Proceedings* of the Simon National Conference, Kilkenny, Ireland, 1982, p. 1 (text of an address).

2. Anton Wallich-Clifford, *Caring on Skid Row* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1976), p. 11.

3. For excellent sociological treatises on homelessness, refer to: Howard M. Bahr, *Skid Row: An Introduction to Disaffiliation* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973); Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man,* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1923); Howard M. Bahr (ed.), *Disaffiliated Man* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1970); and Jacqueline P. Wiseman, *Stations of the Lost,* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970).

4. Howard M. Bahr and Theodore Caplow, *Old Men Drunk and Sober* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1973), p. 5.

5. Reg McCabe, "Homelessness is Our Greatest Social Problem," *The Secondary Teacher,* Dublin, January, 1978, p. 2.

6. *Trust,* (Dublin: Dublin Trust Organization, 1981), p. 1 (pamphlet).

7. Justin O'Brien, "Poverty and Homelessness", in Stanislaus Kennedy (ed.), *One Million Poor?* (Dublin: The Turoe Press, 1981), p. 76.

8. O'Brien, *op. cit.,* An. p. 76, n. 7.

9. Personal interview with Dr. Lawrence McGibbon, July 22, 1982.

10. *The Case for a Homeless Persons Act,* (Dublin: Dublin Simon Community, 1982), p. 1.

11. Marie Lynch, "The Dublin Dosser," *Simon Ireland Newsletter,* Vol. 11, 1976, p. 5.

12. *Ibid.,* p. 5, fn. 11.

13. Frank Naughton, *Vagrancy in Dublin* (Dublin: unpublished report on file at the Dublin Simon Community, 1978), p. 18.

14. Personal interview with Dick Shannon, director of the Dublin Simon Community, August 4, 1982.

15. Aileen O'Hehir, "Mental Illness and the Homeless," *Simon Ireland Newsletter,* No. 28, 1978, p. 2.

16. Frank Cluskey, "The Political Will to Help the Homeless," *Simon Ireland Newsletter,* No. 29, 1978, p. 6.

17. Naughton, *op. cit.,* p. 26. fn. 13.

18. Lynch, *op cit.,* p. 8, fn. 11.

19. Paul Drury, "Irish Law Grossly Against the Homeless," *Irish Independent,* February 20, 1978, p. 10.

20. *The Case for a Homeless Persons Act, op. cit.,* p. 1, fn. 10.

21. "Newspapers Ignore Poverty and Oppression," *The Irish People,* July 16, 1982, p. 3.

22. Ryan, *op. cit.,* p. 5, fn. 1.

23. "Increasing Number of Homeless Indict All Society," *Irish Independent,* February 18, 1978.

24. Jim Behan, "Everyday Institutions—A Loser's View," *Proceedings* of the Simon National Conference, Kilkenny, Ireland, 1982, p. 8 (an address).

25. Samuel E. Wallace, *Skid Row as a Way of Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 139.

26. McCabe, *op. cit.,* p. 9, fn. 5.

27. "Where Sarsfield Quay Went Wrong," *Simon Ireland Newsletter,* No. 18, 1977, p. 5.

28. Naughton, *op. cit.,* p. 14, fn. 13.

29. Alice Leahy and D. Magee, *Report on Broad Medical Service for Single Homeless People in the City of Dublin* (Dublin: unpublished report on file at the Simon Community Office, 1976), p. 3.

30. O'Hehir, *op. cit.,* p. 3, fn. 15.

31. John Long, "The Lifestyle of Homeless People in Dublin," transcript of an address presented at the National Conference of the Irish Simon Community, Dublin, February 18, 1978, p. 1.

32. Dave Magee, "Health and the Single Homeless Person," *Simon Ireland Newsletter,* No. 7, 1976, p. 5.

33. Personal interview with Ron Stangroom, manager of Salvation Army's York House Hostel, July 28, 1982.

34. Personal interview with Alice Leahy, staff member of Iveagh House Hostel, July 22, 1982.

35. Eric Stewart, "The Homeless, Civil Rights, and the Law," *Simon Ireland Newsletter,* No. 28, 1978, p. 7.

36. Michael MacGreil, "Attitudes Toward the Socially Disadvantaged," *Simon Ireland Newsletter,* No. 38, 1979, p. 3.

37. See: Michael MacGreil, *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ireland,* (Dublin: College of Industrial Relations, Naas, Kildare; published in cooperation with the *Leinster Leader,* 1977).

38. MacGreil, *op. cit.,* p. 4, fn. 36.

39. Ian Hart, "Social Prejudice in Ireland," *Simon Ireland Newsletter,* No. 24, 1977, p. 7.

40. O'Brien, *op. cit.,* p. 88, fn. 7.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Trust, op. cit.,* p. 3, fn. 6.

43. *The Irish People, op. cit.,* p. 3, fn. 21.

44. Ryan, *op. cit.,* p. 6, fn. 1; for examples of journalistic treatment of homelessness, refer to: "Coming Back to Life," *The Sunday World,* May 17, 1981, p. 12; "Simon Gets Injunction to Stop House Blockage," *Irish Times,* April 6, 1976; "Do Dubliners Really Care for Down-and-Outs?," *Evening Herald,* September 19, 1978; and "Simon in the Suburbs—A Study in Conflict," *Irish Press,* August 4, 1981.

45. Lynch, *op. cit.,* p. 8, fn. 11.

46. Dick Shannon, "Prejudice," *Simon Ireland Newsletter,* No. 37, 1979, p. 2.

47. "House of Horrors," *The Sunday World,* October 5, 1975.

48. Paul Murray, "Report Critical of Ambivalence Towards 'Winos' and Vagrants," *Irish Times,* September 19, 1978.

49. Cluskey, *op. cit.,* p. 8, fn. 16.

50. "Co-ordinating Body for Homeless to be Set-Up," *Irish Times,* February 20, 1978.

51. Naughton, *op. cit.,* p. 27, fn. 13.

52. O'Brien, *op. cit.,* p. 91, fn. 7.

53. Cluskey, *op. cit.,* p. 10, fn. 16.