

Informalism and the passing of 'Lugs' Branigan: The (re)discovery of 'community' in Irish policing

The Garda Síochána Act 2005 provided, for the first time in Irish history, a legislative basis for the establishment of formal police-community consultative mechanisms in Ireland. In light of this, this paper poses a straightforward question: why did it take so long for these measures to be developed? What was it about 'policing' and 'community' in Ireland that ensured such measures did not make an earlier legislative appearance? I suggest the answer lies in the fact that one of the key sources of legitimacy for An Garda Síochána, the Irish police force, was informalism. In very specific ways, Irish policing developed in light of the key tenets of cultural nationalism, and relied on implicit understandings of community in determining the nature and contours of police-community consultation. Jim 'Lugs' Branigan, who retired from the force in 1973 after more than 40 years service, in many ways exemplified this model of policing, and this paper reflects on his career and its symbolic significance in an effort to understand the (re)discovery of community contained in this recent legislation.