[IC – 017]

Boundary review Strangford and Quoile

The proposed area for a new Strangford and Quoile Westminster constituency seems to make good sense. For east Down (Quoile and Downpatrick) there is much more community of interest in these areas around Strangford Lough than with the south of the county, particularly on the other side of the Mournes.

On a more general point it is good to see that somebody is recognising that it should be possible to develop a more realistic social unit (insomuch as a Westminster constituency can be so described) held together by relationship to Strangford Lough, than is represented by the present Newry, Mourne and Down local government district which stretches from Saintfield to beyond Crossmaglen. It is patently obvious that this is too unwieldy ever to develop a unified sense of identity. Its creation suggested that the balance of sectarian head-counting took precedence over the social, community, and day to day realities of life in east Down.

In relation to Westminster constituencies I express the opinion that it is unwise and unnecessary to put too much emphasis on equality of population without regard to these community realities. It may be more realistic for an MP to look after a larger constituency which has social cohesion rather than dividing it unnaturally for the sake of equality of numbers. The same argument works in reverse, as in the Western Isles, where community of interest combines with geography to produce a practical boundary. In Northern Ireland it might also be applied to an effort to return to respect for county boundaries. These may now be a bit fuzzy in places but the county retains a fundamental place in our mental and social maps.