

# Domestic violence cases double since new Act

By Carol Coulter

THE number of domestic violence cases before the district courts in Dublin has almost doubled since the introduction of the Domestic Violence Act, which came into operation on March 27th last.

A total of 3,878 barring and protection orders were sought in the legal year 1994-1995, an average of 74 a week. In the first six opera-

tional weeks of the new Act, 732 applications were made, an average of 122 a week.

The Act extended the protection of the 1981 law from spouses to cohabitants, parents and others living in "non-contractual" relationships.

It also introduced a safety order. Under the 1981 Protection of Spouses and Children Act a spouse could seek either a protection order, which was an interim mea-

sure, or a barring order, which barred the violent spouse from the family home.

A safety order protects the applicant from threats or intimidation without the violent partner being removed from the house.

Barring orders and protection orders still exist, and can now be obtained by cohabitants, parents being intimidated by violent adult children, siblings or people in same-sex relationships, as

well as by spouses. The period of a barring order has been extended from one to three years, and a safety order can be made for up to five years.

While the criteria for seeking a barring or safety order remain the safety or welfare of the applicant, the definition of "welfare" has been broadened to include "physical and psychological welfare". This provides for threats and intimidation as well as actual physical violence.

Most applications under the

new Act were still made by spouses. However, there were 139 applications for barring, protection and safety orders from people in common-law relationships and 29 from parents. A total of 86 safety summonses and 330 barring summonses were issued, and 294 protection order applications were made.

The Act was introduced by the Minister for Equality and Law Reform, Mr Taylor. A spokesman for his Department said the dramatic increase in the figures showed the need for law reform in this area. "If people are using

it, it demonstrates the need was there," said a spokeswoman for Women's Aid.

An ESRI report on marriage breakdown in Ireland, published last October, found that barring and protection orders through the district courts were sought mainly by social welfare recipients and those on low incomes as a solution to marital difficulties. Such orders can be obtained quickly and without a lawyer.

Legal separations were more likely to be sought by those in employment and with higher incomes, according to the report,

although the demand for barring orders crossed all class barriers.

One section of the Act, providing for health boards to make an application on behalf of a person it believes to be at risk, will come into operation next January.

*The Bar Review*, the new journal of the Bar Council, comments: "The Government have shown commendable concern for those involved in domestic violence by this Act. It must now show further concern and act to introduce a proper system for the resolution of these and other family law matters in our courts."

## Taoiseach to address international crime conference in Dublin

By Jim Cusack, Security Correspondent

THE Taoiseach and Minister for Justice are to address an international conference on crime, justice and public order, which is being held in Dublin Castle next week.

The conference is being organised by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, in conjunction with the Garda Síochána and the Department of Justice.

Academics, senior police and justice officials from 27 countries are attending the six-day conference which opens on Monday.

Introducing the conference programme yesterday, the Garda Commissioner, Mr Patrick Culligan, said the event "underpinned the importance of greater co-operation on the global issues" of crime.

He said crime problems, like drug abuse, were features of all modern societies. He said it was timely and appropriate that the experts from the various fields of criminal justice from around the

world come together to discuss problems which "beset and damage quality of life".

The president of John Jay College, Dr Gerald Lynch, said one of the developments under recent research by the college was the fall in New York's murder rate. He said the number of homicides in the city had fallen by 50 per cent in two years. There were "1,000 fewer people killed than there were two years ago", which had been mainly accounted for by a fall in homicides among black and Hispanic males. This had coincided with more "pro-active" policing in the city which made drug dealers less inclined to carry firearms, he said.

There had been no corresponding fall in the number of assaults against women or against white males. The college was studying the results of the drop in homicide in New York to see if there were lessons that could be applied to other cities.

Dr Lynch congratulated the Garda on its training programme

which, he said, along with Sweden, was probably the best recruiting programme in the world.

The conference is entitled "International Perspectives on Crime, Justice and Public Order".

The subject headings include: ethical considerations in criminal justice; forensics and DNA analysis; terrorism: acts, meaning and response; substance abuse prevention and treatment; Ireland: history, immigration and policing; crime as a global concern; the prevention and treatment of childhood aggression; police reform; monitoring police behaviour; crime prevention; the future of law enforcement; international perspectives on drugs; criminal justice and the media, and contemporary issues in police public relations.

John Jay College of Criminal Justice is part of the City University of New York. It has more than 10,000 undergraduate students, 900 masters students and some 100 Ph.D students.



## Timetable for reintroduction of light rail Bill criticised

By Deaglán de Bréadún, Political Reporter

THE Government's plan to introduce a revised Light Rail Bill next Tuesday has been attacked as a "negation of democracy" by the Fianna Fáil chief whip, Mr Dermot Ahern.

The new Bill, approved at a specially-convened Cabinet meeting yesterday, is an amended version of the one voted down on Tuesday due to the absence from the Dáil of six Government TDs.

According to the Government whip, Mr Jim Higgins, the revised Bill could be brought in only by the suspension of the standing order which precludes consideration of defeated Bills for six months.

"This is the only time any Government has done this in the history of the State," Mr Ahern said.

The Bill is expected to be published today. A Government spokesman said last night the new Bill included provisions "enhanc-

with report and final stages on June 27th. It is intended to bring the Bill to the Seanad on July 2nd and 3rd so that the legislation will have gone through both Houses of the Oireachtas before the Dáil adjourns on July 5th.

A Government spokesman said that under the new Bill, the public would have access through the public library system to the documentation on the Dublin light rail network which CIE must lodge with its application to the Minister before he makes the order to proceed with its installation.

The Bill would make it clear that the inspector conducting the inquiry would be fully independent, while the Minister would also consider the views of the local authorities. CIE would not be able to carry out work on the new lines until the expiry of the two-month period during which members of the public could call for a judicial review.

Ms Liz O'Donnell of the Progressive Democrats was yesterday