

CONFIDENTIAL

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E. R.

*11 P3 Sin Eward Bell*  
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cc. Mr Hewitt  
Mr Abbott  
Mr Boys Smith  
Mr Reeve  
Mr Blackwell

PC/5/6

*4 PA - Pol Devs file*

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Miss Elliott

1. We discussed your minute of 9 May about contacts with the nationalist community. I said that I shared your pessimism about all three of the options set out in your minute.

2. In regard to a Minister of Community Relations the following points might be made:

(a) There are three main aspects to government involvement in improving community relations:

(i) a hearts and minds operation to convince all sections of the community (not least the nationalists) that government is sensitive to their situation and takes proper account of this in forming policy and in administration.

(ii) improvements in the economic and security situation to ease the problems which help to foster violence.

(iii) the support of bodies such as Corrymeela which promote greater contacts and understanding between Protestants and Catholics.

(b) Under present arrangements (i) and (ii) of (a) above are primarily the responsibility of the Secretary of State. This is the right place for them and there would be nothing to be gained by designating one junior Minister as responsible for them. Insofar as there is a community relations dimension - in this sense - to any Departmental item of business the existing machinery (PAB, Central Secretariat, ESL etc) should be able to identify it and see that

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it is not lost sight of. It will receive more consideration and weight through being associated as closely as possible with the Secretary of State's office rather than by being given to a junior Minister.

- (c) Even under a devolved administration it would make more sense for the community relations responsibility to be associated with the office of the Chief Executive rather than be a separate Department. The idea that "community relations" can be improved in isolation from the main thrust of government policy is an illusion, and would lead to the job being regarded as a glorified PR exercise : which is not at all what is required. In the direct rule context the argument is even stronger.
- (d) Existing arrangements are satisfactory for (a)(iii) above : Mr Scott and DENI cover the ground more than adequately, and it is not evident that the relatively small range of bodies and functions concerned would be any better treated in any other context.

3. The main lesson which I drew from the former Community Relations exercise (Ministry and Commission) was the importance of maintaining contact between government and local communities and giving concrete (albeit modest) evidence of sympathetic treatment of these communities. This was one of the main values of the former Social Needs programme. The problems of communication and of sympathy remain with us (I am not suggesting that we revive the Social Need programme : circumstances now are very different) and are addressed in your minute, but I do not believe that a Minister of Community Relations has a role to play in solving them.



P CARVILL  
Central Secretariat

11 May 1984

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