

E.R.

MEMORANDUM FROM THE FPG TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE

THE FUTURE OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVICE

1. We have become increasingly concerned about the growing number of demands for "the reform of the Northern Ireland Civil Service" which have been made in the past 18 months. In many instances, these demands state simply that there are too few Roman Catholics at the top of the Service, that a number of senior non-Catholic officers should be retired prematurely with generous compensation, and their posts filled by specifically recruited Roman Catholics. Our views on the total impracticality of such a proposition and the disastrous consequences which would flow from it, have been made known to you in the shape of briefs prepared in response to specific propositions from a number of sources.
2. Our concern has become critical, however, following some recent public statements which could be taken to imply that the Government is seriously considering such a "reform". We refer in particular to the statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic at his Press Conference following the recent Dublin meeting that the organisation of the Northern Ireland Civil Service had been discussed at that meeting. This was followed by Dr Garret Fitzgerald's address to the United Nations Assembly in which he said that broad agreement now existed between the Government of the Republic and that of the United Kingdom on the solution to the Northern Ireland problem. He said that it entailed, inter alia, the reform of the Civil Service in Northern Ireland so that it might be acceptable to the minority community as well as the majority. This last statement has caused considerable alarm, particularly in the absence of any denial of or comment on it by the United Kingdom Government. The Senior Officers' Association (which corresponds roughly to the first division association of the UK Service) has written to the Head of the Service expressing its concern at the implication that agreement has been reached without reference to the Northern Ireland Civil Service and seeking an unequivocal denial of this from an authoritative source in the United Kingdom Government.
3. In these circumstances, we think it of paramount importance for you to be aware of our views as a body.
4. We know that there is a religious imbalance in the Service, particularly in the senior grades. We do not think it sensible to discuss the reasons for this

We also know that recent recruitment figures show that at the clerical level we are taking in people at about the religion/population ratio and that we seem to be fast approaching this at the higher levels. In the course of time, therefore, the Service as a whole should reflect the religious make-up of the Province.

5. Earlier briefs on this subject have deployed the reasons why any method of quickening this natural process by early retirement of non-Roman Catholics and specific recruitment of Catholics to replace them, at whatever level in the Service, would be utterly disastrous. In brief, these reasons are as follows. Although the Civil Service is not immune to the strains which affect the whole population, it has retained a remarkable cohesion and is one of the stabilising forces in the community as a whole. There has been a very positive attempt at all levels to avoid people being regarded either as Protestant civil servants or as Roman Catholic civil servants - in great measure this effort has been successful. Deliberate recruitment of civil servants on a religious basis would split the Service into two: it would be bitterly opposed by the Staff Association, the majority of whose paid officers are Roman Catholics; it could lead to industrial action within the Service and that not confined to Protestants. The Parliamentary Commissioner would certainly report overt maladministration if a case was made to him and the Civil Service Commission would never again be able to claim that it was an impartial body which recruited only on merit.

6. In practical terms, it could only lead to a grave reduction in the efficiency of the public service. The Civil Service is already badly stretched and there is a shortage of talent; we could not afford to lose prematurely any that is available. We consider that the Service has shown during the days of Direct Rule that it can advise and work well with a non-Unionist administration: to put in a number of transplants is tantamount to a vote of no confidence. The Working Party on Discrimination in the Private Sector rejected unequivocally any suggestion of employment quotas or benign discrimination. The Government has accepted the Report. It would be inconsistent for the Government to adopt a different line in the public sector, to take specific action to increase the number of Roman Catholics and to make the discrimination open and flagrant.

7. We therefore wish to put it on record that we shall be bound to oppose any proposal to increase the number of Catholics in the public service by means of specific recruitment exercises, or any other form of discriminatory recruitment, however well disguised or benign. The Senior Officers' Association has made its views known and unofficial discussions with the Staff Side of the Whitley Council

have made it clear that they too would oppose any form of discriminatory recruitment. We are therefore confident that we speak not only for ourselves, but for the vast majority of the Service.

8. It is true that none of our members is a Roman Catholic but we would be equally opposed to a proposition that there might, at some future date, have to be Protestant-orientated recruitment in order to correct a temporary imbalance. The actual religious denomination involved is irrelevant; the proposal itself strikes at the very roots of what a Civil Service stands for in the United Kingdom.

9. We hope that we have misread the current situation. If so, we recommend strongly that it is made clear in an official statement to the Northern Ireland Civil Service that there is no intention, as part of the current political negotiations, of interfering in any way with the recruitment and promotion procedures of the Service. If, in practice, this intention exists, then we must leave no room for doubt that we are united in opposition to it.