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RE

MEETING TO DISCUSS MEASURES RECOGNISING IRISH IDENTITY
HELD ON 1 AUGUST

Present: Secretary of State Miss Elliott
 Mr Scott Mr Reeve
 Mr Brennan Mr Bickham
 Mr Bloomfield Mr Daniell

The meeting had before it Mr Scott's submission of 18 July; each of the measures was discussed in turn, followed by a general discussion of how to take them forward.

Repeal of the Flags and Emblems Display Act (NI) 1984

2. Repeal could be achieved by order in council (affirmative resolution); given that no consultation was required, if the measure were to be announced in October repeal could be effected before Christmas 1985. This would remove an irritant to the minority community, although it would have little effect in practice; in particular it might have to be made clear that repeal did not give carte blanche to fly the tricolour in all circumstances.

I Voters

3. Enfranchisement of I voters in local government elections would require a Bill and therefore might take a little time to achieve; nevertheless a decision to act on these lines could be the subject of an early announcement. It was agreed that enquiries should be made of DOE(UK) to establish whether there was any forthcoming local government legislation in which the I vote provision could be included. It would be odd to have a separate bill on the subject. Enfranchisement for Assembly elections could be the subject of an Order.

Amendment of the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act 1975

4. While this was a reserved matter and could be effected by Order without reference to the Assembly, it would be controversial. It was agreed that the issue should be dealt with in the light of the consideration of the future of the Assembly.

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Street Names

5. There were dangers in obliging Councils to adopt dual language signs where that was the wish of the majority in a particular area. Some unionist councils might choose this as an issue of principle on which they were prepared to defy the law. An alternative approach might be to regard street name signs as "street furniture" and therefore as a matter for DOE-NI; the department could then return the function of co-operative councils on an agency basis. It was agreed that further thought needed to be given to this in conjunction with DOE-NI.

Better reception for RTE

6. This had been discussed in the context of AIIC and talks were continuing on the technical aspects. Locating RTE transmitters within Northern Ireland would not be desirable but there were other possibilities, including boosting the powers of existing RTE transmitters and rebroadcasting RTE programmes on BBC channels. It was agreed that this needed further study.

Irish language and culture

7. Mr Scott was still exploring this area, but it was agreed that it would be unwise to seek to impose a requirement to teach Irish on Protestant schools.

Avoiding unionist symbols

8. It was agreed not to proceed with further study of this.

General discussion

9. There would be a greater need for Irish identity measures if the Anglo-Irish talks broke down; in that event, there would have to be an urgent statement of the Government's proposals for Northern Ireland which would include identity measures. If agreement was achieved, the position was not so clear cut. On the one hand, it would not seem necessary or desirable to come forward with additional proposals to please the nationalists; on the other, it might be better for HMG to take the initiative rather than appearing to be pushed into taking action by the Irish. Symbolic measures, such as those under discussion, could be the straw to break the camel's back so far

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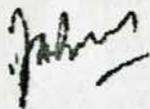
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as unionists were concerned; it might therefore be necessary to ask the Irish not to push too hard too quickly. Repeal of the Flags and Emblems Act could prove particularly emotive in the wake of an Anglo-Irish agreement.

10. Summing up, the Secretary of State said that if the talks broke down, we should need to be in a position to act quickly on identity measures; and work should proceed against that contingency. If there was agreement, there was not a strong case for an identity package; the measures could be taken individually over a period. There would have to be consultation in Whitehall in order to find a suitable legislative vehicle for the I voter provisions; and the Home Office and MPO would need to be brought in on any proposed legislation concerning disqualification from the Assembly. We should need to be in a position to circulate to interested Ministers a draft 'hypothetical' White Paper containing, inter alia, the identity measures in the autumn.

11. I should be grateful if Miss Elliott would proceed accordingly.



J A DANIELL
Private Secretary

2 August 1985

cc PS/S of S (L&B) - M
PS/Mr Scott (L&B) - M
PS/Mr Patten (L&B) - M
PS/Mr Bloomfield - M
Mr A Stephens - M
Mr Parkes - M
Mr Barry - M
Mr Carvill - M
Mr Chesterton o/r
Mr Gilliland - M
Mr Merifield - M
Mr Lyon
Miss Elliott
Mr Reeve - M
Mr Bickham

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