

P/A. Copy to (i) Lord Langford, 47/86C
(ii) Belfast Action Teams.
88B7C. Doneg. 19/6/87. M. Harcourt

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SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

Doneg.
MR. CASAN

The Most Reverend Cahal B Daly DD
Bishop of Down and Connor
LISBREEN
Somerton Road
BELFAST
BT15 4DE

15 June 1987

My dear Bishop,

At our meeting on 18 May, you put forward several helpful suggestions for strengthening constitutional elements in West Belfast and countering extremist influences. I am now writing in reply to your proposals.

You suggested that all public job-creation agencies be brought together to boost the development of employment in the West Belfast area. We have already prioritised this area by giving the highest levels of industrial development assistance and have ensured that the Industrial Development Board (IDB) and the Local Enterprise Development Unit (LEDU) both take particular care to assist projects. An example of this is LEDU's Local Enterprise Programme (LEP) which has already helped 4 initiatives in the area at a cost of some £1.5m involving 80,000 square feet of factory space. Another 2 projects, involving approximately a further 50,000 square feet of factory space are currently being negotiated. In addition both the IDB and LEDU are working closely with the Belfast Action Teams' initiative referred to below. We would however be happy to consider any future ideas for action in this area which you may wish to put forward.

In relation to "Environmental Rehabilitation" you will be interested to know that the Department of the Environment has set up Action Teams in 2 pilot areas within Belfast to identify co-operation with other public agencies and the local community. The 2 areas selected - Lower Falls/Lower Shankill and New Lodge/Duncairn - will be followed by 2 further areas in each of the years 1988/89 and 1989/90. The overall objectives of the Action Teams are to bring about an improvement in the quality of life and an enhancement of the opportunities and prospects of people living in inner city areas suffering from particularly severe problems including their environmental decay. The Action Teams operate under the direction of the Belfast Development Office who will be pleased to look into any specific problem areas you have in mind.

It has always been recognised that the demolition of Divis Flats and the rehousing of its inhabitants will, for a variety of reasons, not least of which is the wish of the residents to be rehoused on the redeveloped site, be a protracted process. You will be aware that one block is being demolished at present and it is hoped to commence a second in the Autumn. The Housing Executive are having discussions with resident groups and will be opening a clinic in its office in the St Jude's block on 15 June. Individual tenants will be invited to visit the clinic to see the outline plans and air their concerns. A public meeting of all residents is planned for the end of the Summer. The Executive has appointed a small specialised team to develop and implement the Divis proposals and you may wish to seek a meeting with the team to put forward your views.

On the question of further education provision in West Belfast I am aware of the proposals published by the Down and Connor Diocesan Authorities that, following nationalisation of maintained secondary school provision in West Belfast, St Thomas' Secondary School could be used for further education purposes. I would urge you to continue your discussions about this matter with officers of the Belfast Education and Library Board which is responsible for further education in the City.

You also referred to the problem of de-skilling in the West Belfast area. The Boucher Road Training Centre provides the industrial skill training for this area. During the past year the Centre's management has been active in visiting local schools and contacting community groups to promote its facilities. As a direct result there has been an encouraging increase in the number of young people undertaking training. In addition, Cathedral Community Enterprises Ltd at Suffolk Road has requested training for about 70 adults in basic construction skills, which is due to commence on 8 June. The Centre plans an Open Day in August to enable local people to view the training opportunities which are available. Considerable resources are also being channelled towards the training of young people in this area, through for example the Community Workshops operating under the Youth Training Programme.

On the subject of the Irish language let me first of all assure you that there is no evidence that the number of teachers qualified in Irish is inadequate. Indeed a report by the NI Council for Education Research showed an excess of teachers with "Irish" qualifications. The training of additional teachers could not be justified unless there is a reasonable prospect of their finding employment in schools.

Secondly, I agree with you about the importance of the Irish language and culture to a number of people in Northern Ireland, as an expression of their Irishness. The Government is willing to support legitimate interest in the language, where it is practicable for us to do so, for example through education and support for the arts. We have been considering a number of areas for possible future development, which were discussed at an earlier meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, and I hope that we shall be able to take forward some of the proposals that have been made.

I regret the lengthy nature of this response but I know you will appreciate that the importance of all these issues demands a full exposition of the Government's position and policies.

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TK

- Lee
- rs/ J J (A-L)
- rs/ Minister of State (A-L)
- rs/ Mr. Needham (A-L)
- rs/ Dr. Mackenzie (A-L)
- rs/ Mr. Visser (A-L)
- rs/ Mrs (A-L)
- rs/ Sir K. Bloomfield
- D. Quigley
- M. Aung
- M. Fell
- Mr. Pugh
- Mr. Stephens
- Mr. Jeffrey
- M. Aung
- Mr. J. McCann
- M. Wood

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