

PA SOS meeting with
SDLP TP. 231/B.T.
(copy Boston Globe article
on 226/85C).
Mr. Carson

CONFIDENTIAL

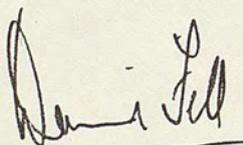
PSDED 301/87

cc NI Perm Secs
Mr Pearson
Mr Haire

Mr R B Spence
Central Secretariat
Stormont Castle

SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH THE SDLP

1. Your minute of 20 March 1987 sought briefing material on any major social and economic issues which either the delegation may raise or should be raised by the Secretary of State.
2. Attached are defensive notes on topics which the SDLP may raise:
 - (a) Equality of Opportunity in Employment
 - (b) Proposed Industrial Relations (NI) Order 1987
 - (c) Draft Electricity (Amendment) Order
3. It is suggested that the Secretary of State should take the opportunity to welcome SDLP's public statements on lignite prospecting in County Tyrone. Concise background information and a line to take on this subject is also attached.



DAVID FELL
26 March 1987

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EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN EMPLOYMENT

BACKGROUND

1. The SDLP paper on the Consultative Paper complemented the broad thrust of the policy proposals (eg) the proposals for a new Declaration of Practice (replacing the present Declaration of Principle and Intent); more effective internal and external monitoring; the continuation of tender acceptance linked to the new Declaration; the ultimate downstream sanction of grant denial; and opposition to "reverse" discrimination and "quotas". But predictably - the SDLP want to push Government as far as possible along the employment equality route. They want more progress in the senior levels of the NICS; wish to see the FEA's resources increased (they reject the idea of a single multi-dimensional Commission); press for ambitious job creation and training programmes in areas of highest unemployment; and argue for specific goals and timetables for appointments (though legal; the FEA recommends such goals/timetables only for applications). In terms of countering the "MacBride" campaign in the US - Mr Hume has made some very helpful and constructive comments recently (copy of Boston Globe article attached). However it is understood that some of his SDLP colleagues are unhappy with his forthright condemnation of the "MacBride" strategy, Mr Hume has not resiled from his position; indeed in a very recent discussion with Mr Viggers he has indicated that he is willing to take further steps (including testifying at Congressional hearings and representations to the ROI Government) to reinforce his views.

2. The consultation period on Government's Consultative Paper does not end until 31 March; comments are still awaited from key bodies (FEA; CBI; Northern Ireland Council on Disability, the Law Society). When received all comments will have to be carefully analysed before policy decisions are addressed. Moreover the Secretary of State has told SACHR (which is also conducting its own employment equality review) that decisions will not be reached until it has reported - in September 1987. Finding an early slot for legislation will also be difficult. So the Secretary of State will not wish to be specific on timing; nor will he wish to give any commitments on the outcome of the consultation process. If pressed on the need to sustain momentum the Secretary of State could recognise the validity of the point and indicate that Government would hope to issue its revised Guide to good employment equality practice (on which urgent work is proceeding) within the next few months.

LINE TO TAKE

3. If employment equality is raised by the SDLP the Secretary of State will wish to emphasise Government's firm commitment to progress. He will also wish to indicate that the broad thrust of the SDLP's policy paper on the topic complements that of Government's own Consultative Paper - particularly in relation to the proposals for a new Declaration of Practice; continued tender acceptance linked to that Declaration; better internal and external monitoring; and the ultimate downstream sanction of grant denial. However, he will wish to emphasise that policy decisions cannot be addressed until all comments have been received (the closing date is 31 March) and carefully analysed. He will also wish to stress that continued investment and sustained job creation are absolutely essential to progress on the employment equality front. Mr Hume has been helpful on this front recently and the Secretary of State may wish to acknowledge this - but in view of possible reactions of others present it should not be overstressed and no reference made to specific instances beyond the article in the Boston Globe. On timing, the Secretary of State will wish to avoid specific commitments; recognise the need for effective and early action; and indicate that - as a further earnest of its intentions - the Government would hope to issue its Guide to good employment equality practice within the next few months.