

F.R.

Mr Chesterton

Mr Humphreys 14/5

to see a return pl

M 13/5

cc: Mr Parkes
Mr Green
Mr Spence
Mr Livingstone, DENI
Mr Wilson, DED
Dr Harbinson

MACBRIDE PRINCIPLES

I have read, as with anything Mr Green writes, with interest, his minute to Dr Harbinson of 5 May.

2. His argument is based on reason, and an attempt to go behind the statistics in order to see what, in the real world, generates them. It is, therefore, persuasive as well as reminding at least me of a number of facts one often forgets or overlooks. On the other hand, support for the MacBride Principles in the USA is not based on the cool reflection of scholars in their studies, but on the confused emotions and memories of the American Irish community and political log rolling. I often fear that much of our target audience in the States has a mental vision of an Ireland where King Billy leads his Black and Tans down the Boyne, turning left at Barry's flying column, to attack the little turf GPO in the West gallantly defended by Sean MacBride with his Oud Fenian Gun while Kathleen Ni Houlihan sits behind him making a tasty tatty stirabout, only to be interrupted by Mother McCree who staggers in muttering something which, above the clacking of her beads, sounds a bit like "Skibbereen".

3. Such an audience seems likely to be unmoved by serious, demographic analysis and their withers will certainly be unwrung on hearing that Protestant unemployment now is worse than Catholic unemployment in the early 70s. (Indeed, the relative rates of 7 and 4 per cent then are as telling against us as the current figures.) Rather I fear that deploying such arguments publicly, or before a mass audience are, as you say, only too likely to be portrayed as the Brits favouring policies of "sterilisation and

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Dr Boyson, when he was with us, stumbled at least on the second of those two bugbears.

4. On the other hand, because it would probably be counterproductive for such arguments to issue publicly, and to a mass audience over our signature, it does not follow that the kind of arguments deployed by Mr Green might not make an impact on the sort of people who write leaders and feature articles in respectable US newspapers and magazines, or even on the occasional Congressional staffers or bureaucrat. I see, therefore, considerable, potential advantage in working up a low key, factual paper, backed so far as possible from authoritative, independent analyses to demonstrate that there is no single, malign explanation of differential employment rates as between Catholic and Protestants in Northern Ireland. There may be such material easily to hand, and perhaps even used already abroad - even though I do not recall having seen such - and it may well be that the PPRU may be able to help further.

5. A second reason for developing this approach, apart from stimulating informed public debate in the United States but also, possibly, at home, would lie in ensuring that our own anti-discrimination policies were as realistic as we could devise. I am not sure whether DED has derived a performance measure, in the Treasury approved sense, for our anti-discrimination policies, but, so long as there is an implicit measure, namely that Protestant and Catholic unemployment rates should be the same, then our collective efforts are almost certainly doomed to failure. We shall be in permanent pursuit of a snark: some benefits will undoubtedly emerge en route, but it is demoralising constantly to pursue yet another policy that has no realistic hope of achievement.

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7. I propose, therefore, subject to your views, to pursue further with colleagues in Belfast ways in which we might inject discreetly, a little more information and reputable analysis into the MacBride debate. (We might, for example, be able to produce a new Greyband on eg employment patterns in Northern Ireland and target its distribution with more than usual care.)



P N BELL

11 May 1987

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