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HCS/12/50

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Mr Carvill  
Mr Doyne-Ditmas  
Mr Abbott - M  
Mr Lyon - M  
Mr Coulson  
Mr Reeve  
Mr Bickham - M

PS/PUS (L) - M

"IRISH IDENTITY"

1. It may be useful to place a few points on record before tomorrow's meeting in London.
2. I have sought to make the point elsewhere that the other side of the coin of "recognising distinctive identity" is "promoting and institutionalising division". To do so may simply be to recognise harsh realities, but one could argue that such proposals ought to be brought forward only if and when attempts to promote internal partnership arrangements have clearly failed.
3. There must also be a real risk of considering "concessions" which are then treated by the recipients as little more than ground bait, to whet the appetite for a more satisfying meal. Certainly I think that any package consisting only of measures to promote the recognition of "Irish Identity" would be widely rejected as irrelevant by a majority of nationalists. One could then face the worst of both worlds, finding oneself provoking an adverse reaction from the unionist side without delivering any significant shift of opinion on the nationalist side. It would be much better to reserve any such package as a supplement to whatever we can work up by way of "institutionalised co-operation" with the Republic.
4. I am not at all confident that we are yet sufficiently well-informed about the real views of the minority. The expression of these through their political representatives is not necessarily completely accurate. We could do with a good deal more sounding of people with less obvious axes to grind. I have myself been talking informally to a number of my colleagues whose links with the minority community are of a different nature to mine. They present an important perspective, which we would do well to take into the reckoning. I sometimes wonder whether we were not premature in abolishing the

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old Community Relations Commission. We have no body of responsible people, free from open political ties, whose business it is to advise us on measures to promote community understanding.

5. If we are to look at the problem in the round, we must confront the aspect of majority triumphalism. The Chief Constable clearly feels strongly about the deleterious effects of bringing thousands of outsiders into small towns of an opposite persuasion to order to mount a massive and assertive demonstration in a form unwelcome to most of the residents. People should not have to put up with this, and the RUC should not have to take the strain of obliging people to put up with it. It is a highly delicate issue, but it does get close to the heart of the problem.
6. The great difficulty we face, it seems to me, is that the religious and cultural "Irishness" of the local minority is so closely interwoven with nationalist politics and symbolism. Canada is fortunate in that France lies across the Atlantic rather than across the frontier from Quebec. Thus it is possible to take an increasingly relaxed view of "Francophone" activities, without fear of any French territorial ambitions. In our case, many of the principal symbols of "Irishness" are essentially symbols of "united Irishness" (eg flag and passport). Thus it is difficult indeed to make significant moves which will not be seen to trench on questions of sovereignty and citizenship.

KPB

K P BLOOMFIELD

12 December 1984

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