

Q 12 1 Mr. Spence You may be interested
to see this note esp. X below.
539/84 2 Mr. Carson ^{20/3} ^{Dona} No note of file. 7.P 24/3/87
Mr. Moore

cc Mr Wallace
Mr T Pearson (Gen Sec)
Mr D Kirk (NIO-L)

Mr Martin

EQUALITY OF RIGHTS FOR IRISH SPEAKING PEOPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

I attended a meeting in London on 16 March with representatives of the UK Committee of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages. Mr D Kirk (NIO London) was with me and will be circulating a full note of the meeting.

Most of the running was made by Mr Napier. His particular concern is support for the Irish language as such. He was against a policy of bilingualism and had asked the Irish side of the Inter-Governmental Conference why they had supported it: their reply was that they had thought this was what people wanted! During the very friendly discussion I suggested that he was occupying a very narrow non-political ground - ground to which I myself could warm, but which was affected by the political constraints arising from the Irish Government, the SDLP and Sinn Fein.

During the discussion I explained the basis of the CHS Survey and its superiority to the proposal from the Bureau of a census question and I sketched the additional allocations which the Arts Council was proposing for activities related to the Irish language. It seemed to me that both these initiatives were of solid importance and could reasonably impress the Bureau.

X | However, there was one proposal which Mr Napier made and which I undertook to pass on to the Department without prejudice. It related to Irish language nursery schools. Those which exist are independent bodies and according to Mr Napier controlled by Sinn Fein interests. In Mr Napier's view the Department of Education should have an officer to co-ordinate their activities in order to ensure the better training of their teachers and the use of good methods. Mr Napier thought the Department should use its latent powers to inspect independent schools. I think he recognised some of the difficulties and certainly I tried to sketch them. My advice would be that when the Department has considered this idea it might give Mr Napier a reaction on a personal basis. I was seriously impressed by his non-political stance on the language and the extent to which he felt his objectives were being fouled up by the various political initiatives with which we have been struggling over the last year or more.

Ans

A J Green
20 March 1987

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