

CITY OF BOSTON • MASSACHUSETTS

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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
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May 24, 1989

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher
10 Downing Street
Westminster, United Kingdom

Dear Prime Minister Thatcher:

People of goodwill toward Ireland and Britain throughout this country fervently hope that the deliberations you will undertake this week in the House of Commons on the vital issue of Fair Employment will at long last produce the basis for ending the society of evident inequality that Northern Ireland has been since its inception 69 years ago.

As your government has itself noted, the unemployment rate for adult Catholics in Northern Ireland is two and one half times that of their Protestant counterparts. Furthermore, the fact that Catholic unemployment is greater than that of Protestants in every urban district in Northern Ireland, creating a total adult Catholic male unemployment rate of 35 percent, suggests that the problem is endemic throughout the province and not confined to any one region. A situation so longstanding and structural in nature requires a governmental response that is sweeping, unambiguous, and which is specifically aimed through the letter of the law at direct outreach and actual hiring into the Catholic community.

It is with the utmost sincerity that I as an American elected official state my hope on behalf of my constituents that at this critical time the historic opportunity presented to you will not be missed. Let it be stated in fairness that the intollerable persistence of employment discrimination in Northern Ireland on the basis of religion is the result of a failure of will on the part of all parties who have governed from Westminster and should not be laid at the doorstep of the current Conservative Government alone.

The enactment, I believe, of a fair employment law which would in practice as well as promise provide the basis for actual affirmative action in hiring into the minority community, along with effective measures dealing with contract compliance, and which will contain adequate mechanisms for swift and strict enforcement, will serve to encourage more U.S. investment. It should be evident to all that the current climate of instability in Northern Ireland, fueled both by violence and the continuation of a society in which discrimination in employment on the basis of religion, serves as a serious obstacle to increased private sector investment from any outside quarter, and

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undoubtedly from within the United Kingdom itself. Allow me to emphasize that I stand second to no one in advocating increased investment in Northern Ireland by more U.S. companies. Likewise, I support the efforts of the United States Government to play a constructive role as a major funding source of the International Fund for Ireland. Our country owes much to the people of both great Irish traditions who have played such a significant part in the development of the United States and to the attainment of our own freedom and liberty.

But hand in hand with the need for more U.S. investment must go the need for a fair employment law on the part of your government which insures that it is targeted to those areas of the highest unemployment and which insures direct recruitment in significant numbers from the ranks of the unemployed in the Catholic community which makes up more than 40 percent of the Northern Ireland population. Increased investment without a clearly established commitment to fairness on the part of the British Government will do little to change the grim political and economic landscape of Northern Ireland. Without the hope of a job, young men for years to come will continue to serve as the raw material for the paramilitaries and the vicious cycle will continue.

Simply stated, 1989 must be the year for a fundamental change in the British Government's approach to both ending discrimination in employment and in correcting the evident patterns of disinvestment in areas with high Catholic concentrations. Those who advocate and condone disinvestment from Northern Ireland are mistaken and misled and that is particularly the case when the British Government is itself involved in the process of disinvestment. The present government's intimations that it seeks to transfer significant portions of the services provided by the Royal Victoria Hospital in West Belfast over to East Belfast is a case in point. What useful purpose would be achieved by the removal of the major source of jobs in West Belfast, particularly jobs that are largely held by women who are in many cases the sole breadwinner in their families?

In addition, it should also be clear that since the British Government is itself at present directly responsible for almost one half of the jobs provided today in Northern Ireland that the emphasis of fair employment legislation should not be directed solely at the private sector. The ability of individuals to take action against those perpetuating religious discrimination should include a full recourse against government agencies as well. Furthermore, given the major role played by the British Government in Northern Ireland as a source of business for the private sector through contracts in the purchase of goods and services, it is vital that those found liable of practising discrimination be made subject to predictable and definite sanctions with a clear emphasis in the legislation that action by the government "will" be taken rather than that it "may" be taken.

Above all, no law against discrimination anywhere is effective unless it contains the tools for vigorous and impartial enforcement. The mechanism for enforcement which the House of Commons is yet to codify whether it be through the proposed tribunals or any other entity created to replace the current Fair Employment Agency (F.E.A.), must be empowered to conduct an investigations process that yields results and justice, as opposed to serving merely as a vehicle for listing the number of grievances filed. It is in this regard that the record of the F.E.A. has been especially lacking.

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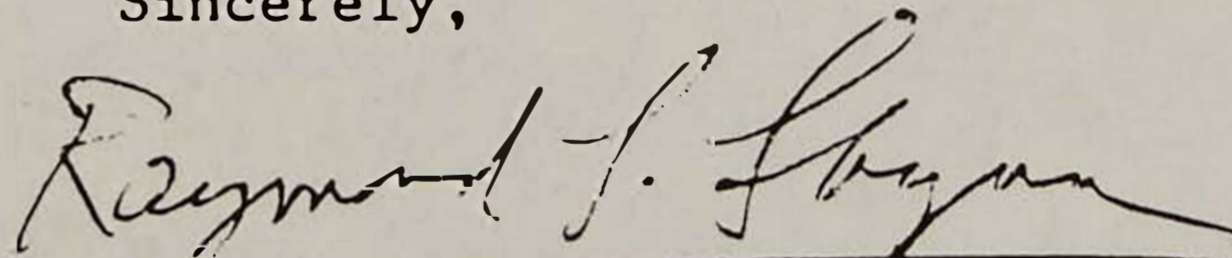
In the American experience we have seen that affirmative action has served as a effective vehicle in both governmental and private sector hiring as a direct method for reaching out to members of a community that had been shut out from the work force. That approach also requires the implementation of effective monitoring procedures by government to insure both access to those seeking employment and compliance by employers. Anything short of it, simply is not affirmative action. In addition, if the British Government is to serve as a agent for change in this critical area, it must also lead by example at every level of hiring and promotions, in the blue collar as well as in the white collar civil service sectors.

Given the fact that there are an average of 100,000 job changes in Northern Ireland each year at present, the legislation must deal with the need to recruit significant numbers of Catholics for those existing jobs that arise as the result of promotions and retirements among workers from the Protestant majority. Any argument that seeks to confuse such action with a quota system is specious at best. Further to this and previous points, any effort that seeks to continue the current Fair Employment Act approach favoring voluntary enforcement of affirmative action and contract compliance guidelines will be simply inadequate for dealing with a problem so structural as religious discrimination in employment in Northern Ireland.

I know from first hand experience that fighting discrimination is never easy. But government must show leadership, vision, and will power if real progress is to be achieved. Rest assured that in the months and years to come that I will continue my active interest in the issue of fair employment in Northern Ireland since it remains an item for legitimate public discussion in our country given the substantial level of U.S. investment in the North both public and private. Likewise, I will continue to support investment with fairness in Northern Ireland along with such constructive efforts that we can all agree on like Boston Ireland Ventures, which I helped initiate, as it encourages cross-border cooperation as well as seeking more investment and job opportunities for all Irish people under the example of a partnership between Derry, Galway and Boston.

Almost seven full decades of second class citizenship for Northern Ireland Catholics requires that this legislation that will take us into the 21st century be more than a reworking of the failed promises of the 1976 measure. Above all else, justice demands that this not be the case.

Sincerely,



Raymond L. Flynn
Mayor of Boston

RLF/rj