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Secretary
Mr. Nally
Ms E. Doyle
Mr C O Flainn

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An Runaiocht Angla Eireannach,
Beal Feirste

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21 May, 1986

RECEIVED
ANGLO-IRISH SECTION
Time Date

Mr. Eamonn O'Tuathail,
Assistant Secretary,
Anglo-Irish Section

Dear Eamonn,

We have been thinking here about possible ideas for the discussion on the Irish language at the next meeting of the Conference.

As you know we have already submitted a paper through the Secretariat dealing with: place names, the use of Irish in official business, the 1991 Census and support for the Irish language in publications, cultural events etc.

It is striking that Sinn Fein have given to the Irish language such a high priority in the past few months. This is reflected in the number of references to the Irish language problem in speeches by Adams, speeches and articles by Adams on this and other topics in the Irish language, the continuing effort to take over and control the Irish language movement in Belfast in particular, and of course the highlighting by Sinn Fein of the recent unfortunate meeting between Adams and a member of Bord na Gaeilge. It would, we suggest, be worth our while to develop this argument with the British.

In addition to what has already been proposed, we would like to suggest three general ideas as means to ensure a fruitful discussion at the June meeting of the Conference.

First, we would suggest that the Department, in consultation with the Departments of the Gaeltacht and Education, should formulate a unilateral policy for actions to be taken by the Irish Government in relation to the language in Northern Ireland in the coming months. The idea here is to ensure that those in Northern Ireland who are involved with the language and the much wider circle of nationalists who regard the language as having a high symbolic importance would see that the Irish Government is doing something itself to promote Irish in Northern Ireland, and is not simply depending, on the one hand, on the Conference (and therefore on the British Government) and, on the other, on voluntary organisations (and notably Sinn Fein). It seems to us that a small and relatively inexpensive package could be put together which would have an impact in itself but which could also include a number of ideas which might be useful in terms of getting "movement" within the Conference. We would suggest that one way of hitting on convenient ways of making a concrete commitment to the language in Northern Ireland would be to review the existing resources committed by the Government to support for the Irish language in the South and, specifically, the list of programmes under various headings which are currently financed by the State, with a view to identifying a number of measures which could be inexpensively extended on a unilateral basis to Northern Ireland. One possibility might be to include primary and post-primary teachers of Irish in Northern Ireland in any existing retraining or refresher summer courses on the teaching of Irish organised under the auspices of the Department of Education. Another might be the extension of the existing support for An tUacht and the announcement of an invitation to Irish language organisations in Northern Ireland to apply for support for their publications. In this connection we would

suggest that the Department of the Gaeltacht consider making a grant to "La" which would be sufficient to enable the paper to be published completely independently of Sinn Fein.

A second related general idea would be to offer through the Conference assistance in specific areas to the authorities in Northern Ireland to reinforce their support for the language. As it is, in our document of 6th January 1986, we have offered assistance to the authorities in the formulation of legislation in relation to the use of the Irish language in official business. We would now suggest that it might help to "shame", as it were, the British into being more positive were we to offer assistance and even resources in a number of areas. One possibility might be to offer the services of primary and secondary school inspectors with expertise in the teaching of the Irish language to supply the deficiencies in the resources of the Department of Education in Northern Ireland about which there have been genuine complaints. These inspectors could be used both within the teaching system and in relation to examinations. Another idea might be to offer to place at the disposal of the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland the resources of the Placenames Commission in Dublin as an information source and as a research agency on the Irish language origin of placenames in Northern Ireland (we have already proposed this in our paper). The public announcement of such an idea would be helpful to many nationalists in conveying a degree of Dublin "involvement" in an area of interest to them. At the same time it could be represented to King that it would be absurd to refuse this offer, as Northern Ireland has no resources of its own in relation to placenames, the vast bulk of which in Northern Ireland are linguistically Irish in origin. A third possibility might be to offer through the Conference a number of scholarships to the Donegal Gaeltacht to students at all three levels in Northern Ireland.

A third general idea would be that, once you had got the support of Departments in Dublin for any proposals the Minister wishes to make, it would be useful if we could have an exchange with N.I.O. officials (including officials from the Departments of Education and the Environment here) some time in advance of the meeting of the Conference.

Specifically on placenames, you are aware that I have provided to the British side two copies of "Ainmneacha Gaeilge na mBailte Poist" (Oifig on tSolathair 1969) which gives the form in Irish of the postal districts throughout Ireland determined by our Placenames Commission. You may also recall that we postponed further action on the "Port Mor" problem pending investigation of a legal matter raised by Mr. Lillis. We now propose to return in the Secretariat to the fray on this matter so that the issues can be well ventilated before the Conference meets.

Finally I would suggest that our team (including the Secretariat), going into the next meeting of the Conference, should be fully briefed on the status of Irish and the range of State commitments to the language in the South as well as the position of the British Government on Welsh in Wales and on Scots Gaelic in Scotland.

I would hope that some of these thoughts might prove helpful to you.

Yours sincerely

Daithí

Daithi O'Ceallaigh