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Meeting with Mr. Bob Cooper, Chairman
of the Fair Employment Agency

My primary purpose in going to see Mr. Cooper was to try and get a balanced assessment of the situation in sectors of industry with which we might have cooperation.

Civil Service

In the over-30 age group there was an overwhelming disproportion between Catholics and Protestants, reflecting past recruitment of 10 departmental heads, apart from one English Catholic, all the rest were Protestant. The Agency was not convinced that enough had been done at the higher levels to bring about change. On the other hand of eleven new bodies such as the Health Boards, the Education and Library Boards and the Housing Executive 6/11 of the chairmen/chief executives were Catholic.

On the lower rungs however the picture was much more encouraging. In the 21-5 age group there was a 5/4 proportion among males Protestant/Catholic and 50/50 among females.

The local services, which had mainly been taken away from the Local Authorities, were much improved. They still had problems with Craigavon Council. In general Catholics were well or even disproportionately represented on new bodies, vacancies in which they tended to apply for in large numbers.

Harland & Wolff's and Engineering Firms

At present less than 5% of the workforce was Catholic. At

recruitment level some effort had been made to sell H & W to Catholic schools. Disturbingly, however, last year over 50% of Catholics invited for interview did not turn up.

It had to be assumed that while schools encouraged students to apply, parents put their foot down, and Mr. Cooper said that having represented West Belfast in the past he probably could understand the reasons why. It was difficult to put one's finger on what more management in H & W could do. The situation in Short's was similar, but not as bad. The FEA took the view that on the whole it was better to find new employment outlets rather than to concentrate too much hope on breaking into old ones.

One exception to the pattern was Mackie's which was situated close to the peace line in West Belfast. 40% of the workforce was now Catholic, and he thought that Protestants were gradually ceasing to go there.

Mr. Cooper expected the imbalance in engineering jobs to remain for some time. Older craftsmen would still be overwhelmingly Protestant. On the other hand 40% of engineering students were now Catholic.

Universities

Mr. Cooper said that he expected in the near future that over 50% of students in the North would be Catholic. Protestants had a greater tendency to go to university in England.

Gas and Electricity

As far as the gas industry was concerned, there was a great imbalance in management. However the apprenticeship situation was quite satisfactory. The FEA intended to carry out a full-scale investigation of the situation, before Kinsale Gas came to Dublin.

The electricity industry was appalling. Management was virtually exclusively Protestant. While at the apprenticeship level things were somewhat better, recruitment was not completely centralized, and recruitment round the province was still subject to a great deal of abuse, he suspected.

Broad Conclusions

1. It was difficult to make much progress in static or declining industries. Catholics tended to go disproportionately for new employment opportunities.
2. The FEA could exercise greater influence over public bodies than over private firms.

Political Matters

Before leaving I asked him (he has resigned from Alliance) for his view of the current situation. He replied that like most ex-politicians he was pessimistic. He placed no particular faith in the Prior initiative. While at the time of the Convention he had argued that it should also act as a Consultative Assembly, it was probably too late for this now. Unlike Mr. Paddy Devlin, who argued that the economic situation would force politicians together, he thought it might well have the opposite effect leading

to more intense political fighting.

Philip Mansel

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