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SECRET

Meeting with Gearoid MacGiolla Domhnaigh,
3 February 1986, Belfast

I met at his request with Gearoid MacGiolla Domhnaigh, Secretary of Comhaltas Uladh. Since our last meeting on 15 January 1985 he had prepared a Memorandum on the Irish language in Northern Ireland which he wished to have transmitted on a confidential basis to the Minister as Joint Chairman of the Intergovernmental Conference. He intended to present this Memorandum at an early meeting of the policy committee of Bord na Gaeilge of which he is a member. After consideration within the Bord's structures he expects the Memorandum together with any amendments made to form the basis of a submission to the Government for action within the Intergovernmental Conference.

The Memorandum is attached together with an unofficial translation. It will be seen that it echoes the concerns expressed by MacGiolla Domhnaigh at our last meeting (report of 20 January 1986 refers) particularly in its emphasis on a positive revivalist input which the author sees as coming from the Irish side. However, he also feels it prudent not to give too much prominence for the foreseeable future to the Irish Government's role vis-a-vis the Irish language in Northern Ireland. For this reason he recommends the establishment of an independent Council for Irish under the aegis of the Anglo-Irish Secretariat (Conference?). This would have representatives from various Irish language organisations and be responsible for the development of Irish. It would be financed (£1 to £1.5 million is suggested as appropriate) through the Conference and would supervise an Agency for the Irish Language which would implement its policies. The Memorandum also covers present official recognition of Irish in Northern Ireland, ways in which this could be further developed and gives a detailed list of measures which could be taken to recognise Irish by Government Departments in various fields.

Mr. MacGiolla Domhnaigh told me that he had shown the memorandum to some of his colleagues in the Comhaltas including Canon McEntaggart of Coalisland who is prominent in the language movement. The latter agreed with the thrust of the paper but apparently wondered if it was not too ambitious overall. This prompted MacGiolla Domhnaigh to insert the qualification contained in the note at the beginning. He feels that it would be a positive development if even some of the proposals contained in the memorandum could be implemented through the Conference.

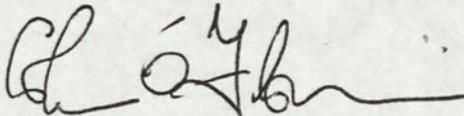
We had a wide-ranging discussion based on his paper and the following specific points are reported from it:-

- MacGiolla Domhnaigh has doubts about suggestions which have been made that local polls should be held to determine how communities feel about street names in Irish. He fears that this might lead to an over-identification of Irish with the Catholic working class areas/"ghettoes" and that the language would be simply another way of identifying these deprived areas. Areas where the majority community are dominant and perhaps better off nationalist areas would not be erecting Irish street placenames if local polls are used to determine the issue. This doubt expressed by MacGiolla Domhnaigh should not be taken to mean that he favours imposing bilingual signs on all communities. As reported already his priority regarding placenames is to provide postal versions in Irish approximating as closely as possible to the English form for those who wish to use them.

- Differences with other organisations emerged as before. MacGiolla Domhnaigh expressed some concern in confidence that Gael Linn who are represented on Bord na Gaeilge would "hijack" the proposals contained in his memorandum. He feels that Gael Linn are not really active in Northern Ireland except in raising money for their pools and that the only real Irish language organisation there is the

Comhaltas itself. He told me that Comhaltas had refused to be involved with the United Kingdom Committee of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages on which Kit Napier, the Belfast solicitor is the Northern Ireland representative (report of 20 January 1986 refers). Comhaltas has one member on the Dublin committee of the Bureau.

- He said that Sinn Fein is "taking over" La the Belfast Irish language daily which has not appeared for some time now.
- MacGiolla Domhnaigh claims credit for persuading The Irish News to print an article in Irish each day since last July. He himself contributes an Irish language lesson each Monday for the same paper (he does not take a fee for this). The current deputy editor Peter Montellier, an American, is apparently particularly open to using Irish material in the paper.



Colm O Floinn

10 February 1986.

c.c. Taoiseach
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Unofficial Translation

Memorandum on the Irish Language in Northern Ireland

N.B. This memorandum is an illustration of ways in which recognition and support could be given to Irish in different State and public fields. It is an illustration of an ideal situation and it should not be assumed that I think it is possible to achieve what is contained in it at an early stage or even in the longterm.

Since the establishment of the Parliament of Northern Ireland, policies which are hostile to the Irish language and culture have been implemented. As a result of deputations from particular Irish speakers and from managers of Catholic schools Irish was recognised in 1922 as an optional subject in primary schools and as an exam subject in second level schools.

Present Recognition of Irish

Department of Education:

1. Irish is taught in primary schools.
2. Irish is taught and is a exam subject at second level.
3. There is a Faculty (School) of Celtic Studies in Queen's University, Belfast.
4. Irish is a subject in the BA Hons Humanities Combined course in the University of Ulster at Coleraine.
5. There is a Celtic Studies Department in St. Mary and St. Josephs Training College in Belfast.
6. One inspector is responsible for Irish at all school levels and he also has a normal district inspectorate responsibility as well.

Education and Library Boards

7. Irish is provided for in the library system.
8. There is provision for Irish at adult level in the local education system.

Mass Media

9. There is a schools programme in the "Broadcasting for Schools" schedule of the BBC.
10. There is a programme for adult Irish speakers in the BBC schedule since 1984.
11. There is a daily article in Irish in the "Irish News" since July 1985.
12. Occasional articles in Irish appear in certain weekly magazines and newspapers.

Churches

13. There is a Mass in Irish in Belfast every Sunday since about 1950.
14. There is an occasional Mass in Irish in various parishes.

There is a strong case for giving more recognition to the Irish language and for providing realistic support to help in the development of the language among the public. I feel, as I present this memorandum, that there is a fundamental problem in achieving the objectives I list. There is a danger that whatever answers are given to particular proposals here will be based on the proposition that the provision to be sought for

Irish cannot exceed that made at the present time for the language by the Government of (the Republic of) Ireland or its local Government, for example it might be claimed that the optimum provision for Irish on radio and television is determined according to the ceiling levels in RTE's schedule and that the provision of bilingual road signs is accepted in the Republic as an example of "reasonable provision".

Additional Recognition for Irish

A. The Government

1. An "Order in Council" should be enacted providing rights for the Irish language in the public domain.
2. "A Code of Practice" should be drafted and a "Policy Statement" issued based on the "Order in Council".
3. Surveys should be carried out to establish and register the number of Irish speakers in the Public Services.
4. An "Irish language Branch" should be established in the Department of Finance and Personnel.
5. A "Translation Branch" should be established in the Department of Finance and Personnel.
6. Irish language affairs should be recognised as coming within the terms of reference of:
 - (i) the Ombudsman
 - (ii) the Fair Employment Agency
 - (iii) the Equal Opportunities Commission.
7. HMSO should be encouraged to provide Irish publications in appropriate cases.
8. An Irish speaker should be appointed to the Government Press Office.

B. Government Departments

1. A policy statement on Irish should be issued by every Minister/Secretary of Department.
2. Responsibility for recognition of and development of Irish should be made part of the internal training schedule of every Department.
3. Forms, leaflets, information booklets etc. should be published in Irish or bilingually.
4. Irish speakers should be recruited to posts at public counters, telephone exchanges etc.
5. A duty list of Irish speakers should be established in each Department.

C. The Public

It is accepted that there are structures in the public service system to put proposals into practice with only the need for new guidelines or emphasis. This is not the case with the public generally. The development of Irish among the Northern public was left to one voluntary organisation, Comhaltas Uladh of Conradh na Gaeilge, since the Comhaltas was established in 1926. The budget of Comhaltas Uladh is currently £40,000+ annually. Half of this is a grant from Conradh na Gaeilge, the other is raised by the Comhaltas itself.

I consider that there is an essential difference regarding the question of encouraging the language in the public domain and in the sphere of Government. I feel that the Government or Local Government will not be prepared to give more than recognition to Irish so long as they can or want to do that and

that it is unlikely that they will take upon themselves responsibility for the development of Irish in the public sphere. Furthermore, it would appear that the development of Irish among the public will not be at the highest level of consciousness in the Secretariat. Even if this is not the case I am not sure that the Secretariat is the most suitable instrument in giving full comprehensive attention to this urgent task. Compensation is needed for the neglect and hostility of 64 years. In the political atmosphere which will exist for a long enough time it would be prudent not to have the hand of the Government of the Republic too prominent in financing or organising the Irish speaking community in the North. I am aware of other kinds of structure but this is the one I prefer.

I recommend a new structure with a high degree of independence to give fair, proper and balanced care to this work of developing (or reviving) the Irish language among the people of the North.

D. The Secretariat

I think that the Secretariat in Belfast has a duty to put proposals before the two Governments, to exchange opinions between the two Governments, to derive plans from these and to monitor joint work. Overall it seems that the modus operandi of the Secretariat is to function with and through Government departments. This method would be suitable for political, governmental, industrial or commercial affairs, but in my opinion it is not appropriate for the public at large. Therefore, I recommend that a new structure "The Council for (the) Irish (Language)" be established, answerable to and under the patronage of the Secretariat.

E. The Council for (the) Irish (Language)

The membership of "The Council for Irish" will be appointed by the Secretariat according to conditions laid down by the two Governments.

The following will be the membership of "The Council for Irish":

- i) Three from Comhaltas Uladh
- ii) Two from other Irish organisations
- iii) Two from Bord na Gaeilge
- iv) Four others (from education, youth, business, trade unions etc.)

"The Council for Irish" will be financed through the Secretariat.

F. Terms of Reference of The Council for Irish

1. "The Council for Irish" will be responsible for the development of the Irish language among the public generally
2. "The Council for Irish" will operate on an independent basis apart from its financial accountability to the Secretariat
3. "The Council for Irish" will have authority to grant money through schemes and rules approved by the Secretariat
4. "The Council for Irish" will have to present a work programme for the following year each year to the Secretariat

5. "The Council for Irish" will have authority to make recommendations and advise the Secretariat on the development of Irish among the public generally and in the Public Service
 6. An "Irish Language Agency" will be established to fulfill the responsibilities of "The Council for Irish"
 7. The structure, range of activity and financing of the Agency will be authorised by the Secretariat.
- G. Structure of the Irish Language Agency
1. A full time director will be appointed
 2. An office and administration branch will report to him
 3. There will be a team of five organisers
 4. The following areas will be served:
 - i) Youth
 - ii) Adult
 - iii) Irish language organisations and Irish culture
 - iv) Irish language publications
 - v) Research
 5. The structure will be developed as appropriate.

H. Financing

There is a principle involved in the question of the Irish language in Northern Ireland. It is clear that the United Kingdom Government has a duty to serve all its subjects in a fair way; this is recognised in language affairs in Wales and Scotland. In the case of the Government of the Republic of Ireland this is recognised too in the Constitution of Ireland. Therefore, it is clear that the two Governments in this partnership/joint effort have a duty in regard to recognition of Irish (the duty of the United Kingdom Government) and in regard to revival of Irish (the duty of the Government of the Republic of Ireland). Different formulas will be needed to finance these two duties and it appears that a unified working will be desirable for the structure as a whole. There is a danger too that the question of Irish will be dealt with on the basis of relativities e.g. vis-a-vis financing for Wales, for Scotland but even if this is the case a sum of £1 million to £1.5 million would be fair for the North. This level of financing should be available to whatever system is established. At the same time since permanence is a feature of the dual understanding (Anglo-Irish Agreement?) a solid foundation should be laid for Irish language courses in the North. Whatever the structure questions of staffing, grading and so on would be settled through the usual system - I have not dealt with these matters in detail.

I describe in appendices some proposals which different departments could address without much internal restructuring. The appendices give examples of the ways in which measures could be taken to give effect to the rights of Irish speakers in the public domain in the North.

APPENDIX

Detailed Proposals for particular fields

A. Department of Education

1. Appoint a senior inspector responsible for Irish alone (He would have the normal general administrative responsibility)

2. Increase the number of in-service courses for Irish teachers (Improvements in Training Colleges would be necessary as a result of this)
3. Establish a system to publish Irish texts for teaching and learning
4. Recognise a "special post" for Irish in every primary school
5. Give scholarships and sabbatical leave to Irish teachers (In co-operation with : The Arts Council (N.I.); The Ulster Museum (2); The Public Record Office etc.)
6. Give recognition and grants to aid the Irish speaking nursery schools
7. Give seats on the "Council for Continuing Education" to Irish language organisations
8. Promote further "Teacher Exchanges" with the Republic, particularly with teachers from the Gaeltacht
9. Establish a seminar for Irish teachers from the two parts of the country
10. Give positive direction on provision for Irish through "Further Education" and "Continuing Education"
11. Recognise Irish Summer Schools for grants in aid
12. Recognise the Gaeltacht for "Educational Tours" schemes
13. Recognise Irish speaking youth clubs in the "Youth Service"
14. Establish special libraries for Irish texts and various teaching and learning aids (audio-visuals etc.)
15. Promote "Irish Studies" in primary and second level schools.

B. The Department of Health and Social Welfare

1. Recognise Irish in the registration of births, marriages, deaths
2. Recognise Irish in the 1991 census (Irish/bilingual forms: questions about Irish)
3. Recognise Irish as a cause for complaint in the office of:
 - a) The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (Government Departments)
 - b) The Commissioner for Complaints (Local Government)
 - c) Establish a duty list of doctors and nurses.

C. The Department of the Environment/Agriculture and Economic Development

1. Recognise Irish in public signs (Towns, streets, forests, parks, buses, trains, tickets)
2. Establish an "Irish Branch" in
 - i) The Public Record Office
 - ii) The Ulster Museum (2)
 - iii) The Ordnance Survey Office
3. Publish bilingual mapping from the Ordnance Survey.

D. Department of Finance and Personnel

1. Establish a "Branch for Irish in the Civil Service" and/or appoint a senior officer who would have special responsibility for Irish.

E. The Court Service

1. Recognise Irish in:
 - i) The Court of Appeal
 - ii) The High Court of Justice
 - iii) The Crown Court
 - iv) The Supreme Court of Judicature
 - v) The Registry of Lands
 - vi) The Registry of Births
2. Establish an active list of Irish speakers in the legal profession

3. Establish a "Translation Branch" and publish legal terms (In co-operation with "The Institute for Professional Legal Study" in Queen's University Belfast)
4. Recognise Irish in the Prison Service (appoint an Irish language officer for this).

F. Local Government

1. Recognise Irish in the Tourist Office
2. Give more positive recognition to Feiseanna, Fleanna and similar events in booklets, leaflets and grant schemes
3. Issue rate demands and various forms in Irish/bilingually

G. Services under The Council for Irish

1. Youth

- 1) Work in schools (lectures, events, competitions etc.)
- 2) Work among organisations (classes, lectures, events etc.)
- 3) Establish summer camps
- 4) Organise study scholarships
- 5) Organise training courses (leadership)

2. Adults

- 1) Irish classes (Irish Languages Organisations, WEA, Trade Unions etc.)
- 2) Recruiting Irish teachers for Irish classes
- 3) Organise and provide teaching and learning resources
- 4) Organise study scholarships

3. Publishing

- 1) Commission Irish language books (reading, drama etc.)
- 2) Assist in publishing, managing and financing Irish journals and newspapers
- 3) Input in the media (newspapers, radio, television etc.)
- 4) Monitoring library services etc.

4. Organisation - Support and Servicing

- 1) Comhaltas Uladh
- 2) Irish Drama Societies
- 3) Irish Language Local History Societies
- 4) Irish Feiseanna
- 5) Irish Eigsi
- 6) Irish summer schools
- 7) Irish speaking nursery schools (apart from Appendix A6)

5. Research

- 1) Study and publication of placenames
- 2) The history of Irish in Northern Ireland
- 3) Study and publication of Irish documents in Northern Ireland
- 4) Organise seminars (writing, drama, poetry)
- 5) The development of the language among the public
- 6) Historical research on the language generally
- 7) Education through Irish

Presented by Gearoid MacGiolla Domhnaigh to the Policy Committee of Bord na Gaeilge.

St. Brigid's Day, 1 February 1986.