



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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## MacBride Principles

### Background

The MacBride Principles are a set of demands dealing with fair employment in Northern Ireland. They have been adopted by 5 States (Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Jersey) and several cities which include New York, Boston and Hartford. In addition there are legislative proposals pending in several States including Illinois and Pennsylvania.

At federal level Bills on the Principles have been tabled by Senator D'Amato and Congressman Fish which would ban all imports from Northern Ireland which were manufactured by companies not adhering to the Principles. Many of the groups advocating the MacBride Principles do not support these Bills because they consider them too harsh. The Irish Government is also opposed to trade sanctions.

### Irish Government attitude

The Tanaiste replied to a P.Q. on the Principles on 7 May. His reply in summary was:

- we find the Principles unobjectionable;
- we are pressing for action by the British Government through the Intergovernmental Conference;
- we wish to see overseas investment sustained and increased in Northern Ireland to provide jobs on a non-discriminatory basis.

In an Irish Times interview on 11 May 1987 the Tanaiste said that the Government wished

- "The British as far as possible in practice, in legislation and in regulations should subsume those principles and make them effective on the ground".

In the September issue of Irish America the Taoiseach said that the Government:

- finds the Principles totally acceptable;
- understands fully the anxieties of Irish Americans about discrimination in Northern Ireland;
- is doing what it can through Anglo-Irish relations to improve the situation.

Reaction to the Taoiseach's statement

(a) British Government

1. The British side of the Secretariat on 3 September 1987 made the following comments on the Taoiseach's interview:

- they gave the impression that the two Governments were far apart on this issue;
- the British hoped that the two Governments would focus on the wide area of agreement between them.

In reply the Irish side gave the following response:

- that the Taoiseach has stressed Tanaiste's P.Q. reply as giving Government views on the matter;
- that the British Government had made a tactical mistake in attacking the Principles themselves which are unexceptionable, rather than changing those conditions in Northern Ireland which might be considered to fall short of them.

(b) Friends of Ireland in the U.S. Congress

2. The Taoiseach's remarks caused reaction among the Friends of Ireland. Several of their offices (Cong Donnelly, Cong Gilman, Senator Biden and the Speaker) contacted the Irish Embassy in

Washington seeking clarification. In the light of these remarks, all were concerned that the Taoiseach's comments indicated a shift in policy showing more support for the Principles and less concern in relation to possible investment. They are now coming under pressure from Irish-American groups for unqualified endorsement of the Principles.

(c) U.S. Administration

3. The U.S. administration have strongly backed the British Government on the MacBride Principles issue. At a press conference in Belfast on 10 September the U.S. Ambassador to Britain, Charles Price, remarked on the Taoiseach's interview and stated that there were differences between the Irish and American Governments on the issue of the MacBride Principles. At State level the U.S. Government, through the State Department, have circulated letters of support for the British Government's position.

SDLP views on the Principles

There is no SDLP party line on the Principles. The party leader John Hume and its discrimination spokesman Sean Farren have adopted the position that while there is nothing wrong with the Principles as such the risk is that campaign in the United States may scare off potential U.S. investment. John Hume's stance has been particularly influential in the U.S.

American Companies in Northern Ireland

Since the MacBride campaign is aimed at U.S. investment in Northern Ireland, the employment record of those companies is of particular interest. There are approximately 25 subsidiaries of U.S. companies in Northern Ireland. U.S. companies in Northern Ireland employ 11% of the manufacturing workforce, approximately 10,000 workers. Traditionally the view has been that U.S. companies in Northern Ireland have a better record on discrimination than other companies. This view was adopted mainly because the "flagship" of U.S. investment, the Dupont Corporation in Campsie, Co. Derry, has been to the forefront in advocating fair employment practices.

However, in recent years various U.S. subsidiaries have been identified by MacBride supporters as practising or having practised discrimination.

In particular the Ford Corporation and General Motors have been cited as having unbalanced workforces. In April of this year Ford agreed to establish an overseas management team to investigate work practices at its Belfast factory. The report is due to be published around 18 September. Press reports (originating from Irish National Caucus sources and unconfirmed) indicate that the report will confirm that discrimination is practised against Catholics at the Ford plant in Andersonstown. (Ford has previously been fined for discrimination by the F.E.A. on the issue of failure to grant leave on St. Patrick's Day while closing down on 12th and 13th July).

It is likely that major investigations of the work practices of U.S. firms will take place in the near future as the number of States enacting the MacBride Principles increases. There is little concrete evidence so far, apart from Ford, that discrimination exists in U.S. subsidiaries in Northern Ireland. It should however be noted that there is not enough reliable information available at present to allow accurate for an assessment of the situation.

Anglo-Irish Section,  
16 September 1987.