



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Reference Code: | 2017/4/199 |
| Creation Dates: | 24 June 1987 |
| Extent and medium: | 5 pages |
| Creator(s): | Department of Foreign Affairs |
| Accession Conditions: | Open |
| Copyright: | National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives. |

SECRET

Meeting on MacBride Principles and Fair Employment

As requested I, together with Maria McLoughlin, met a delegation led by Mr. Oliver Kearney, Fair Employment Trust, on the MacBride Principles at Iveagh House on 24 June, 1987.

Present were:

Oliver Kearney : Fair Employment Trust
Robert Mort : ex-member of the Fair Employment Trust
Peter Shevlin : ex-member of the Fair Employment Trust
Mr. William Canning : Independent Nationalist member of
Larne District Council

1. Kearney's case with the Vintners Federation

Mr. Kearney is a founder member of the Fair Employment Trust which was established in October 1985 to promote the MacBride Principles in Northern Ireland. He was dismissed by the Vintners Federation after appearing before a Committee of the Californian State legislature to testify on behalf of the MacBride Principles. He explained the background situation to his dismissal.

He claimed that the dismissal was intended to be a public warning to those involved in the promotion of the MacBride Principles in Northern Ireland. He believed that the NIO had exercised indirect pressure on the Vintners to have him dismissed. The British attempts to defeat the Bill in California had failed despite high expectations of a victory. The NIO retaliated by engineering his dismissal. He realised that he could not take up his former position again but wanted a fair settlement. He said that the NIO were trying to sabotage any prospect of such a settlement. He had arranged a meeting with the Vintners to discuss settlement terms but within one hour of this meeting being agreed it was cancelled.

He had then sought the intervention of the union leader, John Freeman, in his case. Freeman opposes the MacBride Principles but agreed to take up his case privately.

The Vintners refused this attempt at mediation. Kearney believed that this was because the NIO were pressurising the Vintners. He mentioned that he had a meeting with the Cardinal recently about his case and the Cardinal had expressed concern about cases involving members of the Fair Employment Trust.

He believed that the only people capable of ensuring a settlement was the Guinness Group. Irish-American organisations would shortly announce a boycott of Guinness products to force the company to intervene with the Vintners. Kearney asked that the Government discreetly intervene with the Guinness management in order to seek a settlement.

I informed him that I had noted his request and would report it back to the Department. In a reply to a question he said that he was not prepared to seek redress through the FEA or the courts since he did not believe that such a course of action was likely to be effective.

2. Mort and Shevlin cases

In December 1985 Shevlin and Mort resigned from the Fair Employment Trust. Both men are employed in the Personnel Department of the Housing Executive and received written instructions from their employers that membership of the Trust was in conflict with their code of conduct as employees of the Executive. Their case was raised through the Secretariat and the British side said that the Housing Executive wrote to Shevlin and Mort saying that if they wished to remain in the Personnel Section they would have to resign from the Trust. The Housing Executive, it was claimed, offered both men a transfer to another section should they wish to remain members of the Trust.

Mort and Shevlin both denied that an offer of a transfer had been made and expressed concern that wrong information had been supplied through the Secretariat.

Both men claimed that they had been open members of the Trust since its inception. There had been no problem with the Housing Executive for over a year but the Housing Executive was forced to act on orders of the Department of the Environment. Mort said that it was ironic that the Department of the Environment would seek to persecute members of the Trust, a body founded to achieve equality, while other members of the Personnel Department were allowed to be members of the Ulster Clubs, Orange Order and Masonic Lodges. If members of the Personnel Department could not be members of the Trust then membership of these other organisations should also be prohibited. If such an order was made then he and Shevlin would accept the prohibition on Trust membership. However, the present situation was an example of blatant discrimination against nationalists. He felt that this situation should be addressed by the Secretariat in Belfast.

Both Shevlin and Mort explained that they had resigned from the Trust and were present in a personal capacity.

3. The MacBride Campaign

Kearney said that the campaign was going very well in the United States. The next State where a Bill would be introduced would be Kentucky. The Irish-American groups backing the Principles were engaged in a battle with the British representatives in order to secure the Governor's signature for the New Jersey Bill.

Kearney said that the campaign for the MacBride Principles had encountered hostility initially from DFA staff in the United States. However, he commented that there had been a major improvement in this area in the last few months. I replied that this criticism of DFA staff was unfair and that guidelines

had been issued to all Missions in the U.S. outlining Government policy on the basis of the Tanaiste's PQ reply of 7 May 1987.

Kearney said that the campaign would be moving outside the United States. There had been discussions with Canadian Trade Union groups to start a campaign in Canada. The Fair Employment Trust had discussions recently with some MEPs about introducing a motion into the European Parliament.

Councillor Canning said that the Larne District Council was in receipt of European Community money yet the Council had refused to sign the FEA declaration of intent which in itself was a meaningless document. The Council had used Regional and Social Fund monies in projects which were exclusively aimed at Protestant areas. He felt that no Council with a record like Larne should receive European money without giving an undertaking to spend it in a non-discriminatory manner. Canning said it was virtually impossible for any nationalist to get a job with the Council. He felt that the Irish Government should pursue in Brussels the question of ensuring equity in the disbursement of community funds in the North.

4. Effects of the MacBride Campaign in Northern Ireland

Kearney said there was a great desire among the Nationalist Community for the Anglo-Irish Agreement to work. In his meeting with Cardinal O'Fiaich, the Cardinal had expressed the view that Nationalists were waiting for some movement from the Conference. Kearney said that despite this the Agreement had not achieved anything in the area of discrimination while the MacBride campaign was already producing results. Ford had begun investigations into its Autolite factory. Gallaghers, which had a notorious record, were standing up to Loyalist demands in Ballymena. Fisher Body were monitoring its work force and even Short Brothers management were taking action on provocative emblems. Kearney said none of these actions would have been taken

without the MacBride campaign in the United States. He said that the FEA had adopted a more forceful role because of the MacBride campaign.

5. Fair Employment Trust

The Trust would like to establish an office in West Belfast and requested a financial contribution from the Irish Government. What they required from the Government was a donation of office furniture for the office. I replied that I could not give an answer to such a request but would relay the Trust's request for support to the Department for consideration.

R. Bassett,
Anglo-Irish Section,
June, 1987.

2457P