

PS/Minister of State

Mrs. Stinson.

Miss H.C. Harris
to avoid the help of
the papers you which
to do Shorts reading
& NICS files as well
as the PA file.

83
29/1/86

Oral PQ No 173: Mr Michael Colvin (C): fair employment

Attached please find the suggested reply, key points, possible supplementaries on Shorts and Mackies, and background notes. The information on Shorts has been supplied by Mr Watkins' division; the information on Mackies has been cleared with the IDB; the reference to the NICS in the suggested answer has been cleared with the DFP; and the background note on the NICS position has been supplied by DFP.

J.E. Wolstencroft ✓
J E WOLSTENCROFT ✓

22 January 1986

cc Secretary
Mr Mayne
Mr Watkins
Mr Wilson

No 173

(From Notice Paper and given in Telex message)

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION FOR ~~WRITTEN~~ ANSWER ON 30 January
ORAL

BY Mr Michael Colvin
Name of Member

Romsey and Waterside
Constituency

TEXT OF QUESTION

To ask the S of S for NI if he will make a statement on the effect of his Department's policies to promote fairness in employment in Northern Ireland.

DRAFT REPLY

in accordance with Departmental objectives of fair employment

Government is fully committed to equality of employment opportunity in Northern Ireland. It practices this within the Northern Ireland Civil Service, and funds independent agencies charged with its promotion. The Fair Employment Agency promotes equality of opportunity and the elimination of unlawful discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion. Tenders for Government contracts are only accepted from those who have ~~(signed the Agency's Declaration of Principle and Intent)~~. Government also funds the Equal Opportunities Commission which works for the eradication of sexual discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity and pay between men and women generally. Recently officials presented a comprehensive report on how our approach to equality of employment opportunity could be made more comprehensive, consistent and effective. I am considering that report in detail with a view to publishing proposals for discussion.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

(These should be given on an attached sheet if lengthy)

See Attached Pages

Reply prepared by J Wolstencroft Tel No 63244 Ext 271

Additional information available from Mr McNally Tel No 63244 Ext 486

Fair Employment - Key Points

Effect

Not as effective as would wish, particularly on central religious issue

Religion

Unemployment increased for both communities; but little change in differential between 1971-1985. Catholics still twice as likely to be unemployed, unskilled, low paid and under-represented in higher status jobs. Current unemployment RC (male) 31%: Protestant (male) 13%: RC (female) 16%: Protestant (female) 11%.

Females

Unemployment increased for both men and women; but little change in differential between 1971-85. In 1971 female rate 4.3%; male rate 9.0%: in 1985 female rate 14.5%; male rate 27%. Females over represented in semi and unskilled job categories.

Response of Government

Request for urgent report from officials in response to statistics (published July 1985) indicating enduring employment differential - particularly on religious dimension.

Current Position

Report recently presented; Secretary of State considering its comprehensive recommendations with a view to publication of proposals for discussion. No definitive decisions reached yet.

FEA and EOC funding

Agreed in principle to an increase in FEA current budget (£268,000) now discussing details. EOC funding has been increased by 9% (to £272,500) - compared to 3% increase for EOC in GB.

Fair Employment Trust

Voluntary charitable society, recently formed; possibly linked with US disinvestment campaign; espouses "McBride Principles" - which countenance reverse discrimination - as framework for affirmative action. Recently forwarded a Report to the Secretary of State critical of Government and FEA. Report received, but not yet considered.

Cautions

Avoid complacency; stress Government's concern; recognition that problem of employment differential must be tackled.

Avoid divulging details of officials report, and any commitment on precise timing of proposals for discussion

Avoid over simplification of problem; not only due to discrimination but also to complex of factors (eg) traditional settlement patterns (71% of RCs and 45% of Protestants live in less industrial areas); educational choices; industrial location preferences by private sector.

Shorts and Mackies

Currently sensitive - suggested supplementaries attached.

Shorts

(5)

Is the Secretary of State happy with Shorts progress towards Fair Employment Practices?

Yes. I am convinced of the management's determination to ensure that its policies of equal opportunity are fully implemented and are seen to be so.

Has Shorts co-operated with the FEA?

Yes. The company agreed an Affirmative Action Programme with the FEA in 1983 and has implemented all recommendations made by the Agency.

Mackies

limited to future... as per... 11/1/84

Is the Secretary of State aware of speculation about Mackies' relocation and will the IDB assist the company with it?

I am aware of the recent speculation. I understand that the company has engaged consultants to examine a number of options relating to its future development. Until that work is completed and the company has announced its proposals comment would be premature. If a subsequent request for IDB assistance is made, it would be considered in the light of those proposals.

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Background Note

Introduction

1. The question seeks information on the effect of Government's policies in promoting fairness in employment in Northern Ireland. Its main focus is likely to be the religious employment differential, but interest in that between males and females cannot be discounted. Both are enduring; but the religious differential is of central political importance.

Statistics SACHR and disinvestment

2. In July 1985 the Department of Finance and Personnel published statistics which indicated an unacceptable employment differential between Protestants and Catholics. Though overall unemployment had increased for both communities between 1971-85, the differential was heavily disadvantageous to Catholics throughout most of the Province. Industrial promotion and inward investment activity was already being confronted by a US disinvestment campaign, orchestrated by ultra-nationalist Irish American organisations, and based upon the "McBride Principles" which countenance "reverse" discrimination. Moreover the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights had announced its intention to examine Government's fair employment record; (it is now doing so and should report in 1987). While Government welcomed the SACHR exercise, it could not leave the policy initiative in this area to the Commission.

Government Response and EESG

3. Government responded by requesting an urgent report from officials on how our employment equality policies could be made more comprehensive, consistent and effective, (the Employment Equality Steering Group). The Report was presented recently to the Secretary of State who discussed it with officials on 21 January. It makes a series of very wide ranging and comprehensive recommendations including inter alia replacement of the Fair Employment Agency (and the Equal Opportunities Commission) with an all embracing Equal Employment Opportunities Commission - also dealing with disability as well as religion and sex; the establishment of a Public Service Commission; a statutory duty to practice employment equality in the public sector; and inducements and (eventually) sanctions in the private sector.

Current Position

4. The Secretary of State sympathised with the broad thrust of the Report, endorsed the need to sustain effective momentum in this area of policy, but recognised that further consultative and preparatory work was essential before decisions could be taken on a number of the central recommendations. Officials have been instructed to

do this work (Whitehall consultation on the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission; and a seminar on the Public Service Commission) and to report back to him before the substance of future policy - and proposals for discussion - is determined. The points should be made, therefore, that this matter still carries a high priority; the importance of effective progress is recognised; and the recent report from officials is currently being considered with a view to publishing proposals for discussion. Details of the Report, or of the further work now being undertaken, should not be divulged.

Shorts and Mackies

Shorts

Recruitment note

Mackies

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 clearing here is a need to
 ensure full recruitment of
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 who will contact of
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100-1100

5. The FEA/^{minutes} report on Shorts recruitment was published by the company on 20 December 1985. This confirmed Shorts' progress in implementing the Affirmative Action Programme; recorded the sharp increase between 1983 and 1984 from 14% to 27% in adult application rates from Roman Catholics (10% to 27% for apprentices); and observed, that Catholic adult appointments had changed from 15% to 14% (13% to 24% for apprentices). The disparity between RC adult applications and appointments, particularly in the period April-December 1984, caused some concern and further investigation is to be undertaken. The Agency's threat to withdraw Shorts' Fair Employment Certificate - as it would for any other company - would materialise only if disparities continue and cannot be satisfactorily explained. In the meantime the company has either accepted or actioned all the FEA's recommendations.
6. The FEA Chairman intervened following press speculation that Mackies (workforce 1000; estimated to be 20-30% Catholic) were considering re-location some 500 yards from the present site, but in an area surrounded mainly by Protestant housing. It is now clear that Mackies are undertaking - with the help of consultants - a comprehensive review and planning exercise. Part of this exercise involves examining means of achieving major improvements in manufacturing efficiency and, in this context, one of the possibilities is the transfer of the company's operations to refurbished facilities on Mackies existing "Woodvale" site on the Springfield Road.
7. It will be 2-3 months before the company completes its study and submits its proposals to the IDB. The IDB cannot take any decision on assistance until proposals are submitted and a request for assistance is made. Therefore the IDB has not agreed to support a move to the Woodvale site. Like all parts of Government the IDB endorses wholeheartedly the principles of equality of opportunity and it will have regard to them in considering any future proposals received from Mackies.

Employment Agency. This includes the establishment of a comprehensive data base on the composition of the non industrial Northern Ireland Civil Service. It is anticipated that by the summer of this year a detailed analysis of the data base will be published and this may be accompanied by a short interim statement on an initial analysis of the data base.