



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

15 April 1986

Rt Hon. Tom King MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Office
Whitehall
London SW1A 2AZ

Tom,
At our meeting with you on 26 March, Stuart Bell and I raised, among other issues, the question of withdrawal of funding for ACE workers employed by three community organisations in Derry, the Dove House Community Resource Centre, the Shantallow Tenants' Association and the Top-of-the-Hill Tenants' Association. I am informed that the Derry City Council and representatives of the organisations concerned have now approached your office for a meeting to discuss the issue.

I have been sent a copy of a letter dated 21 March 1986, from the Department of Economic Development Community Projects Branch in Belfast, to the Dove House Community Trust, informing them of the withdrawal of grant aid for the employment of four ACE workers. The letter cites a recent statement by 'the Secretary of State' (apparently a reference to a written answer from Douglas Hurd on 27 June last year) to the effect that 'there are cases in which payment of grant to some community associations would give rise to a grave risk of directly or indirectly improving the standing and furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation', and implies that it is for that reason that the agreement is being terminated. I understand that the other two organisations received letters written in similar terms.

If there is clear evidence that these groups are promoting the aims of a paramilitary organisation it would surely be appropriate to publish this to counteract their efforts. If no such evidence exists, then there would appear to be no justification for the actions of the Department of Economic Development. Either way, however, natural justice surely requires that they be given the opportunity to defend their reputations. In the absence of substantiation of the allegations against them, it is impossible for them to do so.

The question goes beyond the ACE funding alone, of course. When a Government Department gives such reasons for withdrawal of funding it must raise questions in the minds of other bodies as to the wisdom of continued financial or other support. While I have no independent information either way as to the substance of the allegations, I do know that the organisations concerned repudiate them. I also understand that there has been no suggestion that they are unworthy of support for any other reason.

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Under the circumstances, therefore, may I ask you to make public in each case the evidence on which the decisions to withdraw financial support were made? May I also ask you to clarify whether it is now the policy of the Department of Economic Development in Northern Ireland to investigate the political affiliations of all groups applying for, or in receipt of ACE funding? If so, what criteria are used, and which body carries out the investigations? What test is used to decide whether or not groups should receive funding?

You gave the undertaking, in the course of our 26 March meeting, to look into the whole question. Since the work of the organisations concerned, and, indeed, the peace of mind of ACE funded groups generally in Northern Ireland, will continue to be threatened as long as the issue remains unclear, may I ask you to give it your attention as soon as possible, and to consider meeting the representatives of the Derry City Council and the groups concerned in the near future?

J. H. Garry
Derry Community Centre

James
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Your sincerely
Georgina
Private Secretary
Dr. Theobald

PS/SUS (BAG)
PS/Mr Boyson (BAG)
PS/Mr Blackhall
Mr Spence
Mr Pearson
Mr Crozier
Mr J. D. Thompson
Mr Dunlop
PC