

C O N F I D E N T I A L

RW/282/90

FROM: R WILSON
AS CENT SEC
DATE: 11 SEPTEMBER 1990

cc PS/PUS (B & L) - B
PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr Chilcot
Mr Ledlie - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr Thomas
Mr A Wilson
Mr Blackwell
Mr Daniell - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mr Wood (B & L) - B
Mr J McConnell - B



MR HALLETT - URGENT BY MUFAX

INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE BRIEFING: GLOR NA NGAEL (WEST BELFAST COMMITTEE)

I attach briefing on Glor na nGael (West Belfast Committee) for inclusion in the Secretary of State's briefing for Friday's Conference meeting. Sir Kenneth has seen and is content with the advice.

[Signed RW]

R WILSON
CENTRAL SECRETARIAT

RC/3043

C O N F I D E N T I A L

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GLOR NA NGAEL (WEST BELFAST COMMITTEE)

Line to take

Prior consultation with the Irish

1. We do not accept that individual decisions of this nature are a matter for prior consultation under the Agreement, either as confidence issues or as particularly affecting the minority community. The policy itself has been in place since June 1985, before the Agreement was signed, and applies with equal force to both sections of the community in Northern Ireland.

Justification for the Glor na nGael decision

1. For security reasons it is not possible to disclose the information on which the decision was taken. It was my decision and it was not taken lightly or without justification. All such decisions are kept under review and can be changed if circumstances alter (already happened in 4 cases). I have already received a number of representations and I will be considering these in the light of all the information available to me.
2. Decisions of this nature are part of the battle against paramilitary exploitation of both communities in Northern Ireland. Each case is decided on its merits and the policy covers both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary interests. There is no political vetting.

If raised

3. Previous briefing on Conway Mill was of a general, rather than a specific, nature. It is not possible to discuss details of individual cases.
4. The police decision is a matter for the Chief Constable having regard to the legislation governing street collections.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

C O N F I D E N T I A L

Background note

1. There is a strong likelihood that the Irish will raise the Secretary of State's decision to withdraw funding from the West Belfast Committee of Glor na nGael. They have already expressed concern at official level and have been told that this would be drawn to the Secretary of State's attention on his return from leave.
2. The Irish position is that funding decisions of this nature fall to be discussed under the Agreement, especially when they touch upon minority interests and, as in this case, amount to confidence issues. They wish to hear, therefore, precisely how grants to the West Belfast Committee were being syphoned off to paramilitary organisations. The Irish doubt that funds were being misappropriated and consider that Sinn Fein have been allowed to score a major propaganda victory over what they postulate may have been a "relatively trivial abuse", simply because HMG wish to maintain a point of general principle. The Irish regard the general promotion of the Irish language to be important enough to permit the broad view to have been taken on this occasion.
3. Government policy, as set out in Mr Hurd's Parliamentary Statement of 27 June 1985 (copy attached) is to deny public funding in cases where the payment of such funds would give rise to a grave risk of improving the standing and furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation, whether directly or indirectly.
4. In line with this policy, and in the light of confidential security advice, the Secretary of State decided on 26 July that funding should be withdrawn from the West Belfast Committee of Glor na nGael. The decision was conveyed to Glor na nGael on 24 August.
5. The West Belfast Committee of Glor na nGael (an all-Ireland Irish language and cultural body) has operated an ACE scheme

C O N F I D E N T I A L

C O N F I D E N T I A L

since 1985 and at the time of the Secretary of State's decision had 19 approved ACE places plus one full-time core worker (full year cost £100,000). The scheme promoted the Irish language through the provision of support to 5 Irish language nursery groups, the provision of an Irish language resource centre and other Irish language activity. DED has been in touch with the employees and nursery groups about possible alternative employment and support arrangements, but with little success.

6. It was recognised that the withdrawal of ACE funds would have a significant impact on the organisation and would be presented as an attack on the Irish language. Additionally, the fact that the Committee were joint winners of a National award presented to the Committee in Belfast by the ROI Minister of State for the Gaeltacht, Mr Pat The Cope Gallagher, guaranteed an Irish Government interest.
7. In fact in addition to Irish representations the decision has been severely criticised by the West Belfast Committee, Sinn Fein, Irish language groups, other voluntary bodies, and political figures from NI, ROI and GB. Some have presented it as an attack on the Irish language and others as a political miscalculation prejudicial to other Government policies in Catholic/Nationalist areas.
8. A contemporaneous decision by the police to permit a city centre collection by the West Belfast Committee has fuelled the criticism and given rise to allegations that the Secretary of State's decision was taken on political rather than security grounds. In permitting the collection the police apparently took the view that there were no **openly** defensible grounds for refusing permission under the legislation governing flag days.
9. Decisions by the Secretary of State under the 1985 Parliamentary Statement are taken on the basis of confidential security advice, are kept under review and can be changed in the light of

C O N F I D E N T I A L

C O N F I D E N T I A L

a change in circumstances (as has already happened in 4 out of the 26 cases in which funding has been stopped: the overall split is approximately two thirds Republican, one third Loyalist though it has been close to 50:50 at one stage). The security nature of the advice on which decisions are taken render impracticable any formal appeal procedure. There is no political vetting. It is not Government policy to discuss individual cases.

10. The decision in respect of the West Belfast Committee does not affect other branches of Glor na nGael or Government support for the Irish language generally, either through the voluntary sector or within the formal education sector.

CAUTION:

For legal and security reasons the Secretary of State cannot disclose the information on which such decisions are based. The Secretary of State should not be drawn into discussion or speculation about the basis, or validity, of the decision in this case, or any other and should not offer any elaboration on the Parliamentary Statement of 27 June 1985. This is particularly important in view of the suggestion that there may be moves to have the case referred for judicial review.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

27 June 1985

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

The Secretary of State, Rt Hon Douglas Hurd MP, today gave the following written parliamentary reply to Mr John M Taylor (Solihull), who had asked what plans Mr Hurd has to ensure that Government financial support for community activities is not used to foster the aims and objectives of paramilitary interests.

Mr Hurd: "It is the Government's policy to encourage voluntary and community-based activity which has the genuine aim of improving social, environmental or economic conditions in areas of need, and various grant-aid schemes exist for such purposes. However I am satisfied, from information available to me, that there are cases in which some community groups, or persons prominent in the direction or management of some community groups, have sufficiently close links with paramilitary organisations to give rise to a grave risk that to give support to those groups would have the effect of improving the standing and furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation, whether directly or indirectly. I do not consider that any such use of government funds would be in the public interest, and in any particular case in which I am satisfied that these conditions prevail no grant will be paid."