

CONFIDENTIAL

FROM: A M DODDS
31 AUGUST 1990

MD/11464/90/JEC

Not relevant.

ASST. J
SEC 2
31 AUG
CONF

Agreed
not relevant
- not before
sofs

- Mr Ledlie - B
- Mr Alston - B
- Mr Spence - B
- Mr Wood (B&L) - B
- Mr Hamilton - B
- Mr McCartney, DFP (SOLR)

Mr R Wilson - B

MATTER RAISED BY THE IRISH SIDE: GLOR NA GAEL

I have forewarned you and Mr Hamilton, that the Head of the Irish side has personally raised the question of the Secretary of State's recent decision to withdraw funding from Glor na Gael. I fully accept that we should handle this as a casework matter, but the fact that Mr O'Donovan has raised it personally - and at some length - with me, suggests that the Irish side intend to keep the pressure up, especially if they do not get the answer they wish to hear.

2. O'Donovan made it clear that his side would like to have been consulted, since they regard funding questions of this kind as falling to be discussed under the Agreement, especially when they touch upon minority interests, and, as in this case, amount to confidence issues. He found our stance at variance with our willingness to discuss the background to funding policy at Conway Mill, where the Irish side readily accept that certain funds were being misappropriated for paramilitary purposes.

3. It was stressed that any Irish language organisation will have some members who are "undesirable". Accordingly, they wish to hear from us precisely how the grants to Glor na Gael from public funds were being siphoned off to terrorist organisations.

4. The Irish side frankly doubted that the money was being misappropriated. For example, neither the previous post Co-ordinator, Damien Garland, nor the present one, Mire Anderson had any Sinn Fein connections, though obviously that organisation was likely to be represented on the committee.

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5. The Irish were not surprised by recent newspaper coverage and there was likely to be strong feeling in Sinn Fein circles, which would be reflected, in predictable fashion by An Phoblacht.

6. Mr O'Donovan took it as read that we fully understood the all Ireland nature of Glor na Gael, which was a very respectable organisation. Moreover, the Irish President had given the West Belfast Committee a special award. The general promotion of the Irish language was surely important enough to permit the broad view being taken on this occasion. Indeed, the British side were in danger of allowing Sinn Fein to score a major propaganda victory over what may have been a relatively trivial abuse, simply because our side wished to maintain a point of general principle. Mr Collins had recently written to the Secretary of State about street signs and the Irish language and the Glor na Gael issue could now be used to undermine the good work being done to help the Irish language generally. Moreover, it might set back the excellent work being done by Dr Mawhinney and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

7. As you know, I have held a firm line that the Secretary of State had personally taken the decision in accordance with the statement made by his predecessor, Mr Hurd, in 1985. As in other cases of this nature, it was not our policy to comment on the evidence which had led to the withdrawal of funds. The Irish had been given advance warning and the adverse comment in the newspapers and from other quarters was entirely predictable. Our briefing about Conway Mill was of a general, rather than of a specific nature and while the promotion of the Irish language was, of course, important, this, in itself, did not justify special treatment. However, I said that I would refer the Irish request for further information to the appropriate quarter, though I could not promise any positive outcome at this stage. As I have already indicated to Mr Hamilton, the Irish may well raise this at the next Conference, if only on the margins. It may therefore be prudent to provide appropriate briefing for Ministers in the usual way.

(Signed)

A M DODDS

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